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HEALEY: A ROMANCE

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HENRY S. KING & CO.

H E A L E Y

A ROMANCE

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL

*' Hope nothing, if I thus may speak
To thee, a woman, and thence weak.
Hope nothing, I repeat. . . .*

*.
Farewell all wishes, all debate,
All prayer for this cause, or for that I
Weep, if that aid thee, but depend
Upon no help of outward friend ;
Espouse thy doom at once, and cleave
To fortitude without reprieve.'*

—WORDSWORTH

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1875

251. b. 832.

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HEALEY: A ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

'Far off she seem'd to hear the dully sound
Of human footsteps fall.

As in strange lands a traveller walking slow,
In doubt and great perplexity,
A little before moon-rise, hears the low
Moan of an unknown sea ;

And knows not if it be thunder, or a sound
Of stones thrown down, or one deep cry
Of great wild beasts ; then thinketh, "I have found
A new land, but I die."

IT is almost ludicrous to pause here while I remark that by this time not one soul in Hamerton, man, woman, or child, did not know what had happened ; that Sara Holden was Sara Healey, the wife of the Hamerton scapegrace

par excellence, who, with a consistency worthy of a philosopher, was keeping up his character in every respect, and was showing the delighted village what a real scapegrace can do in the way of avoiding all that is decent and respectable.

'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Two or three persons might suffer a good deal in this business, but the whole thing was on the noble Benthamite principle of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number.' That is evident, after a moment's consideration. Two or three, as I said, might suffer, but what is the suffering of two or three compared with the virtuous happiness of a whole village ?

Young and old, rich and poor, all rejoiced in the great event, from the greatest even unto the least. They took it to their bosoms, seated it by their firesides, gave it the foremost place at every meal, gazed upon it, turned it this way and that, viewed it on every side, actual and imaginable, with a gusto gaining

in intensity from the fact that the principals would no doubt suffer extra pangs in the idea of their woes being public property. But what of that? Nothing is so clearly and indubitably public property as a scandal. The Hamerton people knew that—it was part of their creed—the article about which they were least recalcitrant, and they did not forget it now. But to those acting in what was to them a tragedy, outside conditions could be of but little importance. They moved or were constrained within an inner circle, over whose walls they did not look, for their hopes and their fears were inside.

When Ughtred Earnshaw had insisted, with a quiet decisiveness which knew no refusal, that Katharine and Thorgerd should take his rooms, and make whatever use they chose of them, Katharine had assented in very lassitude and weariness, and because it settled things without more ado.

She had about arrived at the end of her powers of endurance; she could do no more.

But cessation from action does not of necessity mean cessation from thought ; it does not needfully imply either rest or repose—to Katharine it meant neither.

While her hands were inactive, and her head free from the usual calls of business upon its powers, her brain was never still for a moment, but recurred incessantly to her woe—to her separation from Wilfrid—to the sudden smiting down of every prospect and possibility of her life ; the snapping asunder of the present ; the utter annihilation of the future.

She and Thorgerd had gone on a Thursday to Mrs. Holden's. It was now Saturday. Late in the afternoon Katharine, who had been silent, and had seemed almost stupefied since they arrived, went from the little room tenanted by herself and Thorgerd to the kitchen.

The only light there came from the fire ; the only life was Sara, in the rocking-chair on the hearth. Motionless, with head leaning

back and arms crossed, she would hardly have seemed alive, if the firelight had not caught her half-closed eyes, and shone there.

Since Wednesday, Sara too had been silent, and apparently apathetic. She had sat for hours by the fireside, brooding, for ever brooding, over the ruin of her short, ignorant, hopeful young life.

As Katharine came in, and recognized within herself by whom that ruin had been effected, her heart ached for the poor girl's loneliness and desolation.

'Sara,' said she, softly, 'I want to talk to you a little if you don't mind.'

Sara opened her eyes and turned them slowly upon the speaker. In her dreams she had been far away; but when she saw Katharine she sighed, and said—

'Ay.'

Katharine drew a chair near her and began—

'I want you to tell me all about your marriage with Wilfrid—how it came about—how

you managed it, and everything. You must try to forget that I am Miss Healey, Sara, and think of me as your sister.'

'Nay, nay! I don't want to threep you down i' that gate. You'll be sore enough about my being *his* wife, wi'out that.'

'No. Don't mistake me. I would never have given my consent to his marrying you—not because I despise you, Sara, but because I like you too well to have let you make yourself miserable if I could have prevented it. But as it is done, I am not going to shirk it. I mean to be your friend and your sister if you will let me. Now, won't you tell me about it? When did Wilfrid first pay you any attention?'

'First time he ever spoke to me in particular were all along o' Crier——'

'In particular? Had he spoken to you before?'

'Ay—like as he did to all on us. He'd say good-day, and give me a nod, for he're

vary pleasant,' said Sara, dwelling with a mournful smile on the recollection.

'Well, but this time, Sara?'

'It were one Saturday afternoon in April. I'd done my work, and gone for a bit of a walk, when Ab' o' Ben's met me. He were always wantin' me to say as I'd try to like him, and I were tryin' to.'

Sara's voice quivered, and Katharine, sorry though she felt, smiled—bitterly. Had not she herself 'tried' to like Louis, and failed to get up the requisite amount of enthusiasm?

'He were vary urgent that time, and I were a bit out o' temper, for Mary Butterworth, hoo'd said as how it were all vary well to have a sweetheart, but when yo'd axed him yersel' it were another thing. So I were some and stiff wi' him, and didn't want to ha' nowt to say to him, and he swore I should promise afore he let me go, and I were cross, and I were terrified too——'

‘Then, Sara, you did care for him a little?’

‘Eh, I liked him well eno’. He were none so ill-favvert when he’re wshed and in a good temper.’

‘Good heavens!’ thought Katharine. ‘This girl might have been safely married to that man, and not a scrap of this happened, if——; but I suppose it was to be. Well, Sara, you were angry, and you were rather frightened?’

‘Ay, and I pushed him away, and axed him what for he couldna’ let me a-be, and I’d begun to cry, too, when——’

‘When what?’

‘When *he* came ridin’ down th’ lane on yon beautiful brown horse. And he stopped, and says to Ab’ o’ Ben’s, “What do you want wi’ the girl?”’

A pause, during which Sara’s face sank upon her hands.

‘Yes, my dear,’ said Katharine, feeling the tears rush blindly to her own eyes.

From this point Sara's narrative was broken with many sighs and tears, and wonderings why she had ever been born. Katharine, however, managed to extract from her broken relation various facts, which her discernment enabled her to piece together, so as to form a tolerably correct theory of what had happened.

Wilfrid, after a moment, had recognized the girl as one of his own weavers, and the prettiest of them, too. He had long disliked Crier, and was beginning to suspect his speculations. He had therefore much pleasure in ordering him off, and desiring him to mind his own business, and when he was gone turned his attention to the tearful flushed girl, whose agitation made her lovelier than ever, and whose air of timidity, combined with a certain naïvely flattered pleasure at his notice, attracted him immensely.

Mr. Healey improved the occasion—asked Sara's story, wondered at Crier's impudence in

aspiring to her, implied his own sense not only of her beauty (he was wiser than to rely simply upon that), but of her superiority. He gave her the impression that he considered her far above her station; and when one considers that he was as wise as a serpent, and she (relatively) as innocent as a dove, it is perhaps not surprising that she should have been what he chose to make her. After that he saw her repeatedly, and was really attracted by her great beauty and simple, *piquante* manners.

She had an uneasy consciousness that she was doing wrong in listening to him—in meeting him—perhaps even in speaking to him; but every time she hinted at such a thing, he had arguments enough to overcome her timid efforts at withdrawal; and perhaps she was only too willing that they should be so overcome.

Katharine gathered from some ingenuous words of Sara that Wilfrid had at first cer-

tainly not contemplated marrying the girl. What had caused him to change his mind Katharine could not quite decide—the reason that seemed *most* likely was that his dislike for Crier had grown into actual, active hatred, and that he had yielded to the temptation of depriving him for ever of any chance of winning Sara. She knew him well, and she was sure that a letter such as Louis hinted at having written, rousing his anger afresh, would be sufficient to propel him with a sudden impulse to almost any deed ; certainly he would not have stuck at such a marriage. Katharine did not for a moment credit him with any higher or more meritorious reason. If by marrying Sara he could ruin his enemy's life, he would have married her—not because of any shrinking from disgracing the girl or making her miserable. There, Katharine believed, was the key to Wilfrid's action ; and no doubt he had chuckled to himself at the idea that his enemy was playing blindly

into the oppressor's hand ; and that in thinking to irritate Wilfrid he was really paving the way to the ruin of all his own hopes.

It has already been related how Wilfrid left home without telling Katharine of his destination : he had stayed in London, met Sara Holden there by appointment (when Ughtred Earnshaw knew the whole story, he recalled Sara's cheerful confidence about 'getting on' in London, and it was accounted for), took her down to Haythorpe, and spent his own time in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Holden's sister, Sara's aunt, was an old woman, feeble and mild—short-sighted in every sense of the word. In that quiet southern village, where they were unknown and unnoticed, it had been easy to accomplish their purpose ; and one morning, after a sufficiently long residence in the place, Wilfrid had driven Sara over to Mr. Gamaliel's church, about two miles from Haythorpe, and they had been married there. The deed was done ;

and once done, the brief fascination was over almost directly. Almost that very day came true the words—

‘So began short love and long decay ;
Sorrow that bides, and joy that fleets away.’

Had Sara Holden been just what she was not—a red-cheeked, loud-talking, bouncing factory lass—she would no doubt have married a spinner or a weaver of her native village, and been the mother of many children ; would have lived a hard-working drudging life in a four-roomed cottage, and never have known a single pang of the more complicated emotions that now warred within her.

If— but ifs may be multiplied to infinity, and hypotheses constructed in any number as to how things might have gone. The fact remains, that from all those different possibilities was evolved that sad actuality. Sin and sorrow, not peace and happiness, were increased. Another item was added to the long list of follies, crimes, and wickednesses

committed by our noble humanity. One man, whatever he was created, rendered himself a great deal lower than the angels—are supposed to be, and one woman was rendered supremely miserable.

There is a kind of philosophy which delights in abstractions, which would turn us and our feelings into units of a whole, would tell us that suffering, in the present state of humanity and 'development,' is inevitable, and would kindly point out to us that our sufferings are but parts of the universal suffering.

Alas! we never can thus regard our sufferings, and there are (low be it spoken!) people who have never even heard of such a system, but who live on, ignorantly believing that they are all absolute, isolated phenomena of vast importance, that their feelings are facts, that their sufferings are real, horrible, and unmerited, and that they might have been prevented.

Such an ignorant being was this girl. She was foolish enough to believe that she had been wronged and ill-used ; that her life had been blighted ; and that her heart—which she regarded not as the central artery of the human frame, but as a vehicle for sorrow and joy—was broken.

In such a case, of course, all systems of philosophy fail to have the slightest effect—a fact which will surprise none but the men who have been at so much trouble in compiling and thinking them out.

When Sara's story was all told, Katharine felt indeed singularly helpless and humiliated before this wrong which she could never undo, this misery which she was powerless to avert.

‘Do you love him yet, Sara?’ she asked, sadly.

‘I can't help it,’ sobbed Sara. ‘That's what makes me so miserable. I love him, and he doesn't love me. And I can't try

not to love him, because he's my husband. Folk must love their husbands.'

Singular reasoning, no doubt. So far as logic went, it was utterly absurd, yet it convinced Katharine Healey.

'I don't care to live,' pursued Sara, 'unless he'd be kind to me and love me again. What can I do? I can never be as I once was. If he'd have had patience, I could have learnt everything—I could have learnt so well that folk would never have laughed at him for having a stupid wife; he shouldn't have been shamed by me. And, Miss Healey, am I so low that I must have pulled him down with me, choosehow?'

'No, Sara. You have that in you which would have honoured any station. If he had chosen to lift you up, you could very soon have stood by yourself—he might have been proud of you.'

'Ay, when folks love as much as I do, there's nothing they can't do. But he'll ne'er

turn to me no more. He's found some one else, and I——am in the way.'

What could her hearer say? She knew that in every sense the words were true. 'In the way.' There is no bitterer thing for a man or woman to find out.

Katharine did not now intend to return to Wilfrid. The frantic, unreasoning fit of Wednesday night had passed off; she now saw more clearly, and felt her will calm and steady. Yet though she felt that she had done right, she derived no happiness from that knowledge; she felt no pleasure that she was right and her brother wrong, and she would have hailed with delight any fact that might invert their positions. And even now she dared not contemplate her course, in case Wilfrid should offer to be reconciled; she would not think of such a thing, fearing lest she should not have resolution enough to reject such a proposal. She sat in the fire-light, holding Sara's hand, and thinking

such thoughts as these—bitter thoughts; wondering hopelessly what was to become of her in her in her outcast, solitary condition.

She had money, plenty of it; she would never know what it was to work hard for a livelihood; she, who could have been quite content with a mere subsistence, for her tastes were of the very simplest, and she was absolutely without the usual feminine love of outward brightness—that show which is to women the seal of worth and the criterion of merit. If Wilfrid had been poor, she would have loved her money; but he was rich too—richer far than she was; all his enterprises were successful; he would never need help at her hands.

She remembered Louis Kay's words—'I have influence with him; I can use that influence in many ways.' Oh, what would Wilfrid's end be? If Louis worked against her, would her brother ever turn in reconciliation to her? Ah, no, never! From that

time she might see him apart from her, drifting further and further away from all that was noble and worthy, while she—— miserable she! Wretched sister!

She could no longer remain quiescent among troops of such thoughts, like brooding shadows now, or again like mocking fiends. She got up to go to the other room. As she moved, Sara moved too, and Katharine was struck anew with the girl's look of illness and decline. 'Perhaps,' thought Katharine, noticing her hollow cheeks and feverish eyes, 'one source of our sorrow may not long remain with us. Such things as she has gone through are sometimes strong enough to kill, and she does not look like one of those who can live through everything. And her father died of consumption, I remember. Well, better for her if it is so.'

She went to Thorgerd and had a long conversation with her, wherein she detailed

all her fears, told her friend how she had broken with Louis, his threat, and the torments of fear it caused her, adding—

‘Thorgerd, whether you can ever forgive me or not, I don’t know. If you do, I shall be inclined to believe in angels. Do you remember that morning at Penfynlas when you and I——’ (her voice failed).

‘Distinctly.’

‘I showed you a letter, and told you that there was my trouble.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, that letter was from Wilfrid. *He* was and is my trouble, and I ought to have told you so long ago. I said at the time that my trouble would never be cured, and you see I was right.’

‘Yes. I soon knew what your trouble was. I guessed directly after I came here.’

‘Then you have not been entirely deceived? You did not suppose Wilfrid altogether pure and spotless?’

‘Oh, no! I soon found out that he was

a man whose life had contained much evil and little good. And he himself told me that he had no good quality in him except——’

‘Except, dear?’

‘His love for me.’

Katharine groaned. ‘Oh how *could* he, when he knew that of all his bad qualities that must have been the very worst?’ She went on, after a pause — ‘Suppose Wilfrid wanted to see you, Thorgerd?’

‘I should not refuse it to him. But’ (in a sad yet unbending voice) ‘he knows even now that we have parted for ever. All the good that is in him will rise up and show him what is right now.’

‘What is *right*!’ said Katharine, bitterly; ‘and do you suppose that will have any weight with him?’

They say that there cannot be love without faith, but Thorgerd had more faith in Wilfrid than Katharine, and yet it was Katharine who loved him most—I do not say best.



CHAPTER II.

‘And he himself, long gazing thereupon,
At last fell humbly downe upon his knee,
And of his wonder made religion.’—*Faerie Queene.*

THE next morning a letter came for Thorgerd from Wilfrid. Katharine recognized the handwriting, and turned away, speechless. It was harder to her almost than anything that had happened to see Thorgerd open that letter, and to know for whom Wilfrid’s heart was filled with regret and love.

Thorgerd read the letter, and then, with a face in which hope and sorrow struggled, gave it to Katharine, saying—

‘I told you he would see what was right, and do it.’

Not hearing a word of the remark, Katharine seized the letter, and read, searching all through it for one mention of her own name, one hint that he had thought of her:—

‘THORGERD,—I wonder whether you will, when you see from whom this letter comes, fling it aside without deigning to look at it: if you did that, and afterwards washed your hands from the pollution of its touch, it would be less scorn than I deserve from you.

‘Yet, if you read so far, unbend and hear me to the end—even if you spurn me when I have finished.

‘Do not think I am going to insult you by trying to make an explanation,—oh, Thorgerd, there is none to give, except that I am—— What? Since Wednesday night I have been trying to find a name vile enough,

pitiful enough for myself ; but I think it does not exist, unless it is Wilfrid Healey ; that expresses all, does it not ? In the future, when you hear or see something very horribly or unspeakably bad, you will think of me ; you cannot help it, if ideas answer to names in your mind.

‘I write, showing that I know you love me ; but in the very act, I renounce all claim to your love. I know that from now that treasure is lost to me. I will never try to see you even, again.

‘If I did not know you for what you are, I should not dare to address you thus ; but *you*, Thorgerd, will know what I mean when I say that henceforth I’ll live for you inas-much as I may. By “you” I mean your memory, for you can now only be a memory to me.

‘I cannot write as I would. All I have said means nothing when I ask my heart what it is I would say.

‘But let me say this—before I knew you I believed in nothing; now I believe in you. If you do not answer me, I shall know that in writing this I added another impiety, another desecration, to the long list which stands opposite my name; so I dare not ask you to reply; but if——; nay, it will not be; yet I must say to you that did you answer me, I should believe in goodness, mercy, pity.

‘Katharine can leave me for a whim, and without a tear; but *you*—I know what it cost you.

‘This is the last, the very last time you shall be troubled by any importunity, any word, from
‘WILFRID HEALEY.’

‘Oh!’ uttered Katharine, drawing in her breath as if she had been mortally wounded. ‘That is too cruel. He is a fiend. He is not a man. Why do I love him? Why cannot I hate him and forget him?’

She flung the letter down, not remembering a word except those which related to herself, and she went to the other room. At that moment the sight of Thorgerd was intolerable to her ; she almost hated her.

Thorgerd, engrossed with her letter, scarcely heeded the departure of the other, but taking writing materials, sat down and wrote an answer to it.

If Wilfrid would do so much for her ; if he meant what he said—— ; she bethought herself of her conversation of the night before with Katharine, and wondered if her influence would be stronger than Louis Kay's.

‘MY FRIEND,—I believe in you yet. I trust you yet. Shall it be in vain? We have loved—that is past. Do not degrade the memory of our love. To me it will ever be the most happy as well as the saddest memory of my heart. I ask you to do something for my sake. I do not say to you,

believe this or that, or become what is called "religious," but if you have learned for my sake to believe in goodness, do not lose that belief. Hold it fast, and if you do keep it even for a year, you shall find it twice as strong at the end of that year as when you first had it.

'Your conscience tells you what you should do, and what you should not do—or what you call your conscience—I know not what it is. Obey that voice, it is the one thing I ask; if you will do so, my suffering shall be willing suffering.

'You speak of Katharine with harshness. Believe me, she will never know one moment's peace until you are reconciled with her.

'Now I say farewell, and I mean it. Fare you well! Think sometimes, not of me, but of what I have asked you.

'THORGERD.'

When she had folded up her letter, she prayed within herself that it might not fall dead and barren upon his mind.

Katharine, when she came out of her room again, had struggled with and overcome the brief, torturing spasm of jealousy. She came to the table and asked—

‘Have you answered him, Thorgerd?’

‘Yes. Will you read what I have said?’

‘No,’ said Katharine, after a pause. ‘It is your parting; I will not read it; but if you have not fastened it up, I should like to put in one or two lines from myself.’

Thorgerd opened the letter, and Katharine wrote—

‘Your words about me have taught me how useless all my anguish has been; yet, Wilfrid, for the sake of our two lives passed together, for all that I have suffered for you, tell me what I can do to be reconciled with you.’

My heart is bleeding: so long as I am at enmity with you, I shall not know one moment's peace. Oh, Wilfrid, be kind—no one will ever love you as does your sister KATHARINE.'





CHAPTER III.

'Then there will be unity, and the conquering passion will proclaim peace where it has made a solitude.'—THEODORE PARKER.



WILFRID received the joint letter of Katharine and Thorgerd the next morning. In the evening Louis Kay came. He was conducted to Wilfrid, who sat alone, smoking.

A change had passed over both the men; perhaps not so very apparent until they looked up and spoke, and then you saw it distinctly.

Wilfrid was pale—so he was always; but now his face looked worn and pallid. All the bluster (it had not been very much) had disappeared from his manner, and there was

left a still, almost subdued composure, which might easily have passed for indifference. Indeed, he was indifferent now to most things. But it was not mere indifference: examine closer, and you saw in the languor of movement—in the careless lowness of voice and the listless gaze—that he was weary.

Louis looked as if he had been severely 'punished.' You saw at once that a fiery trial beset him. He looked haggard and ill; and there was an unpleasantly eager misery in his eyes. Whatever his sins, his suffering had certainly been about as great as he could well bear.

'Good evening,' said Wilfrid, just glancing at him, and not rising. 'There's a chair. I can't ask you if you'd rather go to the ladies, as this is now a thoroughly bachelor establishment.'

'Have you heard anything about them—Katharine and Miss Meredith?'

‘Yes, I know all about them. You cannot give me any news, for I know all there is.’

Louis was slightly puzzled, and slightly annoyed. He distrusted this manner of Wilfrid’s, and looked around inquiringly.

‘Do you want the brandy?’ said his host, purposely misunderstanding him, and knocking the ash from his cigar as he spoke. ‘It’s in that cupboard.’

Louis shook his head, feeling yet more distrustful and suspicious—yet more displeased. Wilfrid was perfectly sober, and as cool as Louis himself—cooler, for during the last few days Mr. Kay’s mental disquiet had rendered him captious in temper, and humiliatingly susceptible in nerve.

For Wilfrid to be surly, sneering, unresponsive, and—sober, was a phase in his character equally new and unpleasant to Louis Kay. Constantly throughout this veracious history, Katharine Healey has been harping on the influence of Louis over her brother—

half-lamenting, half-approving, thoroughly fearing it. And she had not much overrated it. A man must have some rule, some guide, some superior influence, by which he may occasionally regulate his actions; such a rule is necessary to his own comfort. Lawless natures, even, will seek till they find a law, and most natures accept the law which tradition has prescribed as good for them, and obey it, or try to obey it—as, for instance, one man has for his law, God; another, reason; another, anything but reason; another, the doctrines of the English Church; a fifth, Wesleyan Methodism, and so on.

Wilfrid Healey, believing only in one of these things—reason—and not choosing to make any of them his law, had yet found himself unable to stand in perfect comfort entirely alone, and so had taken for his sheet-anchor Louis Kay, to whose advice, when given in real earnest, he had always hitherto proved himself amenable.

Louis had been rather proud of this influence. More especially he had hugged it because it gave him almost boundless power over Katharine. Even now he hoped to work upon her through this influence. Hence his discomfiture at finding Wilfrid in so utterly unresponsive a mood.

‘Why, man,’ pursued the latter, with a short laugh, ‘you’ve been getting yourself up as Mephistopheles, or else Mephistopheles has been getting into you, eh?’

Louis, with an evident effort, cleared his brow a little, and said—

‘Do you know what passed between Katharine and me on Thursday morning?’

‘No, but I’ve no doubt Kate gave you all you deserved. She’s like me; she never forgives.’

‘She says she will not marry me,’ said Louis, rather excitedly.

‘I daresay,’ said his hearer, with much indifference.

‘Well—you daresay—is that all you have to say about it?’

‘It is—and quite enough too.’

‘You will not adhere to your promise?’

‘What promise?’

‘That if I kept that business of yours dark, you would see that Katharine married me.’

‘That business of mine is no longer a light hidden under a bushel. It’s made a considerable conflagration by this time in the shape of scandal, and the best one can hope of it is that it will soon burn itself out.’

‘But it was not made known through *me*. I kept your secret.’

‘Still, the thing is known, you see; and man is fallible.’

‘What has that to do with it? I hate parables.’

‘I mean that if Kate has fairly thrown you over now, not I, nor the Devil himself, would make her marry you.’

‘You could—you can do anything with her.’

‘Have you only just found that out? Have you found out too, that you *cannot* do anything with her, even through me? Perhaps I wouldn’t, if I could, use my influence with her now; but that’s neither here nor there. The simple fact is, that Kate won’t have you, and, my dear fellow, it is not the most dignified thing that you are doing, running about after an unwilling lady. I’ve been disappointed in love too, but——’

Here he greeted Louis with a rather bored but very tranquil smile.

‘You are mad, if you are not drunk,’ said the other, passionately. Then more calmly, he added, ‘You don’t want to quarrel with *all* your old friends, do you, Wilfrid?’

‘That depends upon how “all” my old friends treat me. I’m very happy and comfortable just now. I wouldn’t change places with any man in the three kingdoms.’

This astounding lie remained unanswered by Louis, who said—

‘Then do you mean that you will not be reconciled with Katharine?’

‘Katharine left my house of her own free-will—why should I go about trying to be reconciled with her? As I said to you just now, it is not dignified, and is also much too troublesome.’

‘You don’t seem to have much regard for her reputation, and what the world will say of a woman who is turned out of doors by her only relation.’

Wilfrid stared, and laughed aloud.

‘Who’s talking to *me* about reputation?’ he asked. ‘Was I ever very particular about my reputation?’

‘I’m talking about your sister’s reputation, not yours.’

‘Never you trouble your head about it. Let me hear of Kate being slighted, and I’ll see that the fellow who did it, accounts for it to me.’

‘Much good that would do. It is not the men, but the *women* who will slight her.’

Wilfrid's face had grown dark, yet he laughed as he answered—

‘Kate always was a gem in one way. She gave a wide berth to the women: she never meddled with them. I taught her that. But’—and here his tone changed to impatience—‘what are you driving at? because I can manage my own affairs, and my sister's too, without any interference.’

‘You don't mean to confide in me at all?’

‘Neither in you, my dear fellow, nor in any one else. If you had asked me at first I would have told you, but it is not of the slightest consequence.’

Silence for a space, while Mr. Kay tried to digest this unexpected conduct on the part of Mr. Healey.

At last Louis said, ‘I don't understand you at all. But I suppose you have taken some whim into your head, and must be left to have your own way.’

‘I don’t suppose, certainly, that you would ever guess what my motives are,’ said Wilfrid, with a long yawn.

That was true. The last thought to enter Louis Kay’s head would have been that a decent or meritorious motive was now prompting Wilfrid.

‘Well, you are not sociable to-night. I’ll go.’

‘Don’t hurry,’ was the tranquil reply. ‘Sit as long as you can. You *will* go? Well, do your own way.’

The speaker raised his eyes, leaned back his head, and looked

‘Like a young Jove, with calm, uneager face,’

into the lowering countenance of his friend. It suited him just then to circumvent Louis, and he enjoyed the sensation of having harassed and baffled him. Louis, without speaking again, took his departure, and Wilfrid was left a solitary, silent figure in his arm-

chair. Perfect silence reigned in his part of the house ; he could hear some clocks ticking, and the mirth of the servants, subdued by distance and closed doors. Many a night, ere now, he had sat thus alone, and in as deep a silence ; but Katharine had always been nigh at hand, ready to welcome him, and make much of him if he chose to give her his company. Lately, too, Thorgerd's presence had been a spell to draw him away from his solitude, and most of his evenings had been spent with his sister and her friend in talking, or in silently enjoying the very presence of the being who now seemed to him his all ; who seemed also to be flitting away from him, evading his grasp, growing dimmer and dimmer, more and more shadowy each hour. His thoughts now reverted to her, and in spirit he cried to her, and besought her, feeling her dearer and better than ever ; knowing, too, that his longings were wasted. She was within a mile of him, yet she neither

heard nor answered. Most likely he would never see her face more ; if he did, it must be to gaze upon it from a distance, as Dives looked from his place of torment to heaven afar off, to the fields of light where he would never walk.

As he looked back upon his past, and contemplated all he had done, every impiety, sin, folly (and they had not been few), and, to crown all, that last mad act, his marriage with Sara Holden, his thoughts could hardly have been cheering. *What* they were, I cannot pretend to say :—‘ the heart knoweth its own bitterness ;’ and when that bitterness arises from its own unwholesome state, it must smack of gall indeed.

He had formed now no conscious plan of improvement, but he had stooped. His proud neck had bent to the conviction that a man may not both sin and enjoy—always. The iniquity may be delightful at first—we are told on excellent authority that ‘ stolen waters

are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' There is also a counter-saying, not weighted with Scriptural authority, but very good in its way—'You can't both eat your cake and have it.' Wilfrid Healey probably knew nothing about the first of those adages, but none the less had he experienced it; and he was now beginning also to find out the truth of the second. What he felt, or thought he felt, was, that he loved Thorgerd Meredith, not passionately, not with a passing boy's love, but with the deepest, most enduring feeling of which he was capable: it seemed as if every higher possibility in him were roused and stimulated by her, and through that love he felt that he must endure a remaining existence of longings ungratified, hopes unfulfilled and unfulfillable, aspirations after the higher life, the purer aims, which aspirations were a sin. So, under certain conditions, may even noble thoughts become base, pure and holy things impure and sinful.



CHAPTER IV.

‘Ich ging im Walde, so für mich hin,
Und Nichts zu suchen, das war mein Sinn.’—GÖTTE.



TWO days passed with Thorgerd and Katharine, and Wilfrid sent no answer to their letter.

They had sent their feeble messenger out in hope, though that hope was but a faint and trembling one. They tried to reassure each other by saying that silence with him must mean acquiescence, and that no news was good news; but they felt almost as if bad news would have been better than silence.

On this second afternoon, Katharine, finding

that Thorgerd, wearied with excitement and sorrow, had fallen asleep, resolved to go out and walk *somewhere*. The narrow rooms stifled her; she could stay there no longer.

Out in the sharp open air she became conscious of a feeling of intense languor and weariness—even of weakness. To get away from that stifling place seemed to her what she most wanted; but where to go? If she turned up the village to the right, *that* road led to Healey. There she could not go. If she followed the road over the hills, she would have to pass Stanlaw; to do which she was most unwilling. Only one long, straight, dreary road remained, with stone walls and level damp green fields on either side. She turned away from it, and resolved to venture past the Stanlaw gates. So she passed under the railway arches that spanned the road, and was soon out of the village, and upon the high open road.

She passed Stanlaw without seeing a soul,

and then she felt safer, and more life seemed distilled into her veins at every step. By-and-by there ceased to be walls and meadows. The heather and ling came down to the very roadside, and desolate ridges of moor, sullen under the clouded wintry sky, rolled away on every side, forming a high, slightly undulating horizon line. There was nothing bright or cheerful in the whole scene. The sky was dark; the moors looked, and were, sodden with the floods of the usual Hamerton rainy season.

There certainly were two slight breaks in the dull monotony of the prospect. One was where the canal wound its sinuous length through the valley far below, and reflected with a dull livid glitter the sombre clouds above it. The other was formed by a lone little 'lodge,' which spread its desolate surface upon the moor. Into it protruded the foot of a dark small hill, and lay reflected there. A bleak, wild, storm-beaten scene; and to one

who knew it, there was a sympathetic fitness for it in the lonely figure which met the blast with bowed head and fluttering raiment.

Earlier in the afternoon she had been reading to Thorgerd to soothe her, and send her to sleep. The book had been a volume of the *Faerie Queene*, which she had found on Ughtred's book-shelves; and some words of what she had read now sounded in her ears by snatches, like a sleepy, lulling murmur—the words spoken by 'Despeyre' to the Red-Crosse Knight—

'What if some little payne the passage have,
That makes fraile flesh to fear the bitter wave?
Is not short payne well borne that brings long ease,
And lays the soule to sleep in quiet grave?
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after war, *death after life*, does greatly please.

Then doe no further go, nor further stray,
But here ly down, and to thy rest betake,
Th' ill to prevent that life ensewen may:
For what hath life that it may lovèd make,
And gives not rather cause it to forsake?
Fear, sicknesse, age, losse, labour, sorrow, strife;
Payne, hunger, cold that makes the heart to quake;
And ever fickle fortune rageth rife—

All which, and thousands mo, do make a loathsome life.

Die shall all flesh. What then must needs be done

Is it not better to do willingly

Than linger till the glasse be all outronne ?

Death is the end of woes : die soone, O Faerie's sonne !'

'Good advice!' thought Katharine, 'if one only knew how to take it. I wonder what I came here for.'

Thus furnished with agreeable subjects for thought, she was brooding over them eagerly and darkly, when she became conscious that some one by the roadside paused and looked at her, as though he would speak did he not fear to disturb her. No thought of any possible friend caused Katharine to look up, yet, raising her eyes, her heart grew much lighter when she recognised Ughtred Earnshaw in the loiterer.

'You here, Mr. Earnshaw!' she exclaimed.

'Yes, I have been over to Halifax, and walked back. If you will excuse me, I should say, "*You* here, Miss Healey!" It is getting dark, and this road is extremely lonely.'

Looking round, she found that he was right. The lines of moor were dimmer and more indistinct; the grey of twilight had reached that stage when it is beginning to turn into the blackness of night; and in Hamerton, in November, it is soon dark.

‘It’s true,’ said she. ‘I will turn if you will have me for a companion on your homeward way. You seem to have an aversion for dark and lonely roads.’

He would have replied, ‘For *you* I have,’ if he had uttered his thought; but he said—

‘Have I? I don’t think so, for I am a countryman; and do not like flags and streets, and lines of lamps.’

‘Ah! Then is it from choice or necessity that you have come to this place?’

‘Hardly from either. From Chance, I should say, more than anything.’

‘Do you believe in Chance?’

‘I will call it by whatever name you like—

Fate, Destiny, Doom, Providence. My lot, at any rate, has kept me in the country.'

'And have you no ties? Because I think that those names you have been mentioning, Fate, Destiny, and the rest of them, are generally only grand, high-sounding titles for the most selfish and strong-willed of our friends and relations, who determine our lot in spite of all we can do to prevent it.'

'I have only two relations in all the world—two women, who have never exercised the smallest influence over my career.'

Seeing her absent expression, he feared he was prosing on about matters which could be of no interest to her, and said something to that effect.

'Oh no! Do go on! If you knew how delightful it is to find that I can take an interest in anything but my own miserable affairs. Two women, Mr. Earnshaw, who have never exercised the smallest influence over your career—then they *cannot* be near relations.'

He did not instantly reply, and Katharine, flushing scarlet, exclaimed—

‘But I beg your pardon! I have no right to ask a word about your people. Pray excuse me!’

‘You say it is delightful to you to escape from your own affairs; to me it is as pleasant as it is rare to have any one to speak to of mine. My relations are my aunt and cousin.’

‘Aunt and cousin,’ repeated Katharine. ‘Is their home yours? Are you fond of them?’

‘Their home is mine,’ said he; and she detected in his voice a ring that was not pure pleasure. ‘I am fond of them—yes; they are all I have to be fond of; and I believe they have some affection, too, for me; but they cannot tolerate my opinions,’ he finished, with a smile.

‘Cannot they? Why?’

‘They are Friends,—what they themselves would call very “Plain Friends;” and I was brought up a Friend too, but I ceased to be

one as soon as I had the power to think for myself. I seceded to the ranks of the free-thinkers; and from that I can hardly quarrel with them for using their own judgment, and condemning what they detest so much.'

'Oh, but you can,' said Katharine, warmly. 'How can you call that free-thought which has never passed the bounds of a sect, and that sect a narrow one? Then are they not kind to you?'

'Oh, kind, yes! When I go there they are too hospitable. They think nothing too good either for my body or my soul. The former is agreeable, by way of a change, and for a short time, but the spiritual diet——!'

'Yes,' said Katharine; '"vacant chaff, well meant for grain," is it not?'

'But still, I *am* fond of them; they are so much kinder than their creed. When I go there, I feel that I am in that best of all places—a home; and they are good women in spite of their religion. Miss Healey, good

women have been very much laughed at, carped at, and sneered at, but, I think, chiefly by those who neither are nor can be good themselves.'

As he finished he looked at her, and saw that her lip was trembling, and even the darkness could not quite hide the emotion she felt.

His words had touched the deepest longing of her heart—the desire for a home, for rest, for calm—the wish for what she had never yet had ; for life with Wilfrid at Healey was not *home*.

Moreover, she was touched inexpressibly by the little, unconscious traits of character he had let slip in his talk. She saw him under a new aspect in the company of those two women—kind to them, considerate and gentle, forbearing ; never losing patience at all their well-meant but nauseating endeavours to coerce him into their straight groove and circumscribed belief.

He was so much stronger than they, that he could afford to be gentle with them. From the height of his own calm and assured freedom of thought and breadth of tolerance, he could watch their petty thrusts and narrow, timorous, sectarian fears, without even being amused at them, so utterly were they alien to his nature, and out of the pale of his resentment.

The few words he had let fall about his 'kindred and his people' made her long to hear more. He had told her nothing wonderful, nothing even in the least degree remarkable; but he had given her a glimpse of something so unlike what she had ever known—a glimpse of strength being kind to weakness, upholding it instead of taking advantage of it. Her experience had been uniformly of the opposite kind.

Above all her sadness rose a feeling of pleasure and contentment that she knew Ughtred Earnshaw—a gladness that they

were declared friends; gladness, and a longing too — a longing for the same calmness and steadfastness which she found in him; different from Wilfrid's pride of power and strength and daring; different from Louis' quiet but supreme contempt for most men and most things; different from her own forced indifference and cynic listlessness; and, as she felt for an inspired moment, infinitely higher than all of them. Wilfrid would dash blindly at obstacles, and overcome them by brute force, with clenched hands and set teeth; Louis would quietly slip through the interstices allowed by circumstances, as when

' A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no leaf;
A heavy ox sets chest to briar and branch,
Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole
Behind him.'

She herself made a pride of her subjection, and endured, too proud to strive after what she could not have.

But Ughtred Earnshaw, a man who never scoffed, never sneered, and who yet believed

perhaps even less than herself—how she longed for some of his calm and power! He would go on, gaining his end—or rather his desire would come to him, for fortune waits upon such men as he, as she waited upon Philip Van Artevelde and Harold of England in the first part of their glory; as she would have waited upon them to the end, had they trusted truth more and diplomacy less.

Katharine, contemplating her friend's independence and freedom from the heat of combat and the uncertainty of weakness, felt very much as men

‘Fallen in battle feel,
When far their chief's sword, like a gem,
Points to glory not for them.’

They now came to a turn in the road, passed the gates of Stanlaw, and the lights in the village gleamed: the mills came in sight, looking like squares and oblongs full of lighted gas.

‘Oh!’ said Katharine; ‘what you have

said makes me think what a pleasant place that must be to go to ; for if you love a person, what can his little faults matter ? They are less than nothing. Where do they live, these relations of yours ? ’

‘ At Skernford in Durham, a dull, terribly gossiping place—— ’

‘ All these good people love gossip. A love of scandal seems inseparable from advanced piety. ’

By this time they had entered the street, where lamps were lighted, and where people were passing to and fro. There was noise, life, business everywhere, while behind them were darkest moors, loneliest stretches of houseless, silent heath. The rattle of a string of luries drowned their voices ; the buzz of half-a-dozen mills was in their ears ; passengers jostled them on the footpath. Quiet was over, but Katharine felt unusual buoyancy of heart. She had gone out, seeking nothing, expecting nothing—perhaps even now she had

not found much—but she no longer felt isolated and alone; and she experienced a feeling of gratitude, deep beyond words, to her companion.

Not so he. Heart and pulses beat with a high, rapid, sustained motion of delight at her kindness: while he tried to make himself believe that she would never have taken him for her friend if another had remained to her, yet he was fain to listen to a different voice, which told him that she treated him neither to ceremony nor condescension, but with the respectful cordiality of one equal to another. Such treatment was to his mental palate at once bitter and sweet—sweet, because it showed that she approved him, liked him, honoured him; bitter, because he fancied it quietly assumed that he could never mistake her frankness, or forget his position. He was mistaken: Katharine not only ignored his position, she forgot entirely that he had any position different from her

own. Her mind spoke to his mind ; not her wealth and station to his poverty and obscurity. They walked in silence along the lighted street, and parted at Mrs. Holden's door.





CHAPTER V.

‘Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him ; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native land.’—*Ecclesiastes*.



FEW days later Thorgerd received a letter from home, informing her of the serious illness of her father, and desiring her immediate return. She caught at the idea with eagerness, and Katharine, though with grief, offered no opposition, but went with her to Manchester to see her off.

At the station the train was waiting. There was still about ten minutes before it was time for it to start, and having found an empty compartment, they both got in, and sat there conversing, trying to say farewell. Thorgerd

was pale; her eyes were heavy and sad, and her mouth was closed with that sorrowful tension which marks a secret care.

‘You will not forget to write to me, Thorgerd,’ said Katharine.

‘No, and you will do the same.’

‘Oh, yes. But I have merely a chronicle of sorrows to send you. The history of a fresh disappointment every day.’

‘Well, and that will be better than that my life here should be suddenly put out like an extinguished candle. I shall seem to be near you sometimes if I hear from you.’

It was near the time for starting. A lady and gentleman got into the carriage; they looked comfortable, prosperous young people. There was a great bustle and much shouting on the platform. Katharine clasped Thorgerd’s two hands, and, foreign fashion, kissed her on either cheek, whispering, ‘Good - bye, my dearest friend. If we never meet again——’

Thorgerd was almost speechless. Do we not all know those hideous moments of separation? The people who had got into the carriage wondered in an indifferent way what was the secret of this agony of parting, for though neither spoke, their white faces, and the long, tearless gaze of their eyes, each into the other's, said that it was no every-day farewell.

A porter came down the platform, waving his arm, shutting doors, and demanding in a loud, blatant voice, if there were any more for Chester. Katharine was forced to get out. One more kiss, an 'Adieu!' from Thorgerd that sounded like a sob, and then Katharine stood on the platform; the train began to move, and soon they saw each other no more.

There are some words, more true than sweet—'Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.'

A native country may mean, strictly speaking, the land of one's birth and nationality, but to the strongest and tenderest hearts it means that spot wherein dwells what they most love.

Cold at heart, Katharine left the station, and took a cab to Victoria, where she paced drearily up and down the platform until her train was ready. In due time she alighted at Hamerton in the dark, and took her unwilling way to Mrs. Holden's. When she arrived there, she would be alone: all the next day, and for how many days to come! she would be alone. She felt as if she were a solitary, mateless, companionless atom, dropped down into a world where every one else had some one or something depending upon him, or upon whom he depended.



CHAPTER VI.

'We heard beside the heavenly gate the angels murmuring ;
We heard them say, " Put day to day, and count the days . . .
And God shall draw Ondra up the golden stairs of heaven." '

—MRS. BROWNING.

ATHARINE entered the kitchen. The ruddy firelight shone, but the room was empty of life. She felt an intense, unconquerable repugnance to go to her own desolate room, and she lingered in the kitchen, looking round with careless eyes, unseeing its homely details.

Presently Mrs. Holden came in, crying.

'What is the matter ?' asked Katharine, as softly, and with as much interest as she could.

'Eh, it's yon poor lass o' mine. Hoo's

vary bad—that feeble, and sorry, and her hands like a fire. Eh, I wonder what I’ve done, as this sud have happened!’

A fresh burst of sobs.

‘Oh, Mrs. Holden!’ said Katharine, feeling all the blind, impotent desire to do something against a strong, remorseless evil which visits us at all times—‘I suffer as much as you do. This thing is making my whole life wretched. But what can we do? All our efforts are in vain. It is a cruel wrong; we cannot right it. I’d give my life if *I* could.’

‘Ay,’ said Mrs. Holden, with slow bitter acquiescence, ‘I reckon its none o’ your fault as there’s sich like doin’s. But that does me no good; and it won’t cure Sara. T’lass has had her heart broke; and him as has done it cares nowt about it, nor wont, without t’ Lord punishes him.’

‘He *is* being punished,’ said Katharine, respecting the woman’s indignation, and an-

guish, but feeling that she could not much longer bear to listen to her.

‘Where is Sara?’ she added; ‘I will go to her.’

Mrs. Holden made no objection, and Katharine sought her.

She (Katharine) had got somewhat used to the terrible change in poor Sara, and she knew too that she was dying—that even the strong hope of approaching motherhood could not keep her long alive. The doctor had told Katharine, and she could see for herself, that the girl had not long to suffer. To a stranger one glance would have been enough. Sara, in the bloom of her youth and the pride of her beauty, was doomed. All unwilling and struggling, she must leave a world which she loved—which held all she cared for. For her the future was drear, hopeless, limited. If she went to heaven, which she scarcely anticipated or hoped, what was there to attract her there? The

heaven of Sunday-schools and the Popular Theology is *not* an inviting spot. It was to Sara a bright, comfortless, insupportably radiant place, without recess or shelter, a place

‘Where congregations ne’er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end.’

She did not wish to die, or to go there. She was young, beautiful, admired; she had her joys. True, a blight had settled upon them. Life was not the simple, unperplexing business it had been, but an awful compound, in which it was possible for deceit, contempt, and denial to take large shares, and cause anguish to her. Yet—might not time have wrought a change—would it not work one even yet? If Wilfrid knew all, surely he would relent, pity her, speak tenderly once more!

Trouble brings out faculties which prosperity and satisfaction allow to lie dormant. Sara had begun to feel, to question, to reason, since her great grief had come

about. She did not know that, formulated scientifically, 'Life is the continuous adjustment of internal conditions to external conditions;' but she did know that if 'things had been different,' she might have lived, and might have been happy instead of miserable. Katharine realised now that Sara would not long continue to form part of the big sum of wrong and misery and ill-adjusted conditions which we call life. From that evening she gave herself up to her; she could not undo what had been done, but she could soften the last lingering throes; she could soothe the last repining longings, and take the punishment of her brother's sin. So, after all, though no word came from him, she did not attempt to move, but remained where she was, nursing Sara, who soon ceased even to rise, but lay, weakening, dying as the year died. December closed with fog, rain, and darkness; perhaps Sara might live to see in the new year—it would not be much more.



CHAPTER VII.

'Love, darkly welded to eternal doom.'—*My Beautiful Lady.*

KATHARINE, as the days went by, and she saw Sara daily sinking, formed rather a desperate resolution. She would go to Wilfrid, and would tell him of his wife's state, how she could not live much longer, and would implore him to see her, if only once, again. If he could be got to do that, Katharine knew that for Sara death would lose half its pangs. It was in the middle of January that the doctor said to Katharine, 'I don't think she will live many days—she may not live many hours.'

Katharine then made up her mind to speak to Wilfrid. She dared not trust to taking him by surprise; he might refuse to see her, and even for Sara she could not risk the possible ignominy of being refused admittance. She wrote to him, simply saying that for very urgent reasons she desired an interview with him, and that she begged him earnestly to see her the next day.

An answer was sent; he granted her request; she might call at five in the afternoon, as he could not arrange to meet her any earlier.

No effort could prevent her trembling from head to foot, as she sat in the well-known library, waiting for him. She was very strong, *but* she was very weak, like many men and most women, only she was both stronger and weaker than the generality of them. At last came the sound for which her very soul was listening—Wilfrid's step in the hall, drawing nearer and nearer to the room. She had not

once seen him since that terrible night on which they had parted.

As he came in, she certainly had her face turned in the direction of the door, but she did not see him, only a dim outline ; a mist gathered before her eyes, a sob in her throat. How often we behold such things as this, such waste of love upon such bundles of straw, such empty, well-looking husks of fruitless grain !

That apart, however, she could not speak, and scarcely saw, until he said,—

‘ You have come, Katharine ? ’

Was it wrong to wish that she might say, ‘ Yes, and if you will only let me stay, I will never thwart you again in word or deed ? ’ Right or wrong, that *was* the desire which almost shaped itself into words.

But the weeks of sorrow and separation had all tended to build up, to strengthen, and to establish the force of her one independent act ; and though they had brought her neither a sense of satisfaction in having done right, nor

the calm of conscious virtue, they *had* brought an ever-growing ability to abide by her deed, because it was, as she had said, 'right and just.' And poor Katharine, in fact if not in thought, acted out the words of the Pope to Caponsacchi—

'Work, be unhappy, but *bear life*, my son!'

And it is only to the weak and vulgar that we hold out rewards as an inducement to right doing.

Therefore she had strength enough to say, 'I am here, Wilfrid; will you hear what I have to say?'

'Yes, say on,' he answered, without any impatience.

'You may be angry with me; I cannot help it. Your wife is dying. She will die very soon. Did you know?'

'I have heard something about it.'

'Wilfrid, she is dying half of a broken heart, because you have treated her so cruelly. She is like me, she cares for you whether she will

or not. Since she will be so short a time here—will not you see her?’

‘No,’ he replied in a low voice.

‘It is you who have made her so wretched. You could also make her very happy, by saying only a few words to her—by only seeing her once before she dies.’

A pause, while her pleading eyes seemed yet to say, ‘It is not much I ask.’

At last Wilfrid looked up. His eyes met Katharine’s. She started and winced at the change in him. He was indeed haggard and altered. Those eyes of his sister seemed to draw the truth from him.

‘Katharine, I cannot see her. I might go to her, and ask her to forgive me—I daresay you think I have impudence for that or anything—and say I am sorry, and I repent—; it might console her, or it might not. In any case it would be a lie. I am not sorry she is dying.’ He looked fixedly at her for a moment, and then added slowly, ‘I am glad.’

Pale to the lips, Katharine sat silent, and he went on—

‘I hate myself for it ; but it is so. I have wronged her, I know, and I repent ; but I never should have repented if I had never known Thorgerd.’

Katharine was dreadfully oppressed. It seemed that this man, at any rate, had to pay an awful price for learning that he had a soul which could not be trifled with ; and not only that, others had to spend their best treasure in the same process. For hardness, perhaps for refusal, she had been prepared, but not for so dreadful a naked truth as this. She did not speak, for she did not know what to say. She had no religious or moral pass-key by which to unlock the problems of a distorted human nature.

‘I never cared for what I had done,’ he went on ; ‘you know the word “ought” had no meaning for me, till Thorgerd showed

me. Since then I know—yes, I know very well the consequence of doing what I ought *not* to have done. I have handicapped myself for every chance of happiness; and as I did it myself, I deserve it; but it's not only that—I have made *her* unhappy too.'

He got up, drawing a long breath, and leaned his arms upon the mantelpiece, and hid his face in them, almost groaning.

'Did you ever realise it?' he exclaimed at last. 'Did you ever see what I have to answer for, Kate? I think about it sometimes till I am stupid. It's not only Sara, it's Thorgerd too. I care more for her happiness than anything, and *I* have made her wretched; it's all my doing. Pah! of all the brutes that ever lived, *I* am the most brutal.'

Katharine still sat silent. She was thinking of Sara, how the eager eyes would greet her, how the feeble voice would question her.

'Oh, it is very hard!' said Katharine, in an

awe-struck voice. 'That poor child! how she had counted——'

'What!' cried he, sternly; 'you don't mean you have been letting her think that I would——make it up with her?'

'Oh no! Never once! But I know what has kept her up so long. It is *hope*—the hope that you would own she was your wife, would not send her to her grave, neglected, disgraced, shamed, to the very last. Oh, Wilfrid, she is such a helpless, innocent, ignorant thing! Till she met you she knew no evil. Even now she scarcely blames you; she blames her fate more.'

His face was buried in his hands for a second, then he looked up, white as death. That face was years older since first you saw it seven months ago. The flesh had shrunk, and there were hollows in the cheeks and under the eyes. Fast as he might have lived in years gone by, he had lived fifty times faster, mentally, morally, in the last two

months, than in all the rest of his life put together.

‘You used to profess to be scandalised when I did what you called *wrong*,’ he said, in a hard, intense voice; ‘you little know what a wrong *this* would be. I won’t do it, Katharine. It may sound brutal to you—villanous; I daresay it does. Sometimes I think I am not in my right mind about it. But to me, Sara is one of the hands that helped me when I shut myself out from heaven for *ever*.’

‘I will ask you no more,’ said Katharine, looking yearningly towards him.

Never before had he confessed to a feeling of weakness, regret, or remorse on any point. Now that he had done so, her whole heart went out in pity to him, her brother, her darling, the only creature she loved. Must she leave him alone with his newly-found loneliness and weakness? He was yet looking at her with the eyes that spoke a new

language. Katharine fancied she saw a new spirit, too, and a higher one.

‘Wilfrid!’ she uttered, her whole frame vibrating to a sob of supreme emotion—of grief, joy, love, doubt. And she stretched out her hands towards him. Even as she spoke his face changed—she saw it; read the subtle message that lies in expression, and sprang forward. In an instant her arms were round his neck, and she knew at last one moment of perfect joy, for he clasped her to his very heart, while his lips pressed hers in a long, silent kiss of mingled love and reconciliation.

If it were but for a moment, that moment was worth cycles of daily existence; yea, even of suffering and pain.

Ah, let us own that life has far more griefs than joys, that some lives are shaded with sorrow from birth to death; but let us never yield the conviction that this same life has its moments of joy which can crown those sorrows

with gladness, as we lay a myrtle wreath upon the cross that is a headstone, and make them enduring ; nay, which can make the memory of them, by comparison, almost grateful.

To feel his arms about her as she did then, to have that kiss upon her lips, and to learn, from the sudden burst of deep emotion, that he loved her—he for whose love she cared more than for anything in the world—this was to Katharine the sum of possible happiness ; the object for which she had lived. Existence could offer to her nothing so exquisite again. That passionate, straining clasp at last relaxed. She loosened herself from his arms, so that she could look into his face. It was tender, but sad withal. To her it seemed that there could be no other face half so beautiful. His expression of sorrow and foreboding was in sad contrast with the tremulous, quivering happiness of hers ; his steady, mournful eyes looked into Katharine's, which were dark and swimming in tears ; tears hung on

her eyelashes, and rested on her cheek. At that moment, if at no other of her life, she was beautiful.

‘So you cared for me yet, Kate?’

‘I cannot imagine any state of existence in which I did not care for you.’

‘Well, that’s satisfactory, at all events,’ said he, regaining somewhat of his usual manner.

They were silent for a little time, and then Katharine said—

‘Do you miss me? I miss my work. It is very dreary living with no one but weak women. There is nothing to brace, nothing to sustain. I used to think business and its details dry husks. How I wish I had them now!’

‘Come back when you will. I miss you dreadfully. When shall I have you at home again?’

Her face fell. ‘I cannot come. I must stay with *her*. I took no love to my task, only a kind of dislike, but love has come in spite of myself.’

‘Then do you mean to stay there?’

As he spoke he touched her cheek with his hand, as if, in his new-born tenderness for her, he had need of some caress to make it known.

‘Yes, for the present,’ said Katharine, with a smile of exquisite pleasure and pathos, as she took his hand, just for the delight of proving that he would allow her to hold it without reproof or resistance.

‘For the present,’ she repeated, ‘until——’

Their eyes met; Katharine failed to finish her sentence. Both at the same moment realised that when Sara was dead, Wilfrid would be ‘free.’ Perhaps both, too, knew that there is freedom and freedom.

He might be free, insomuch as having no tie to any particular place or person constitutes freedom; but beyond that——. Katharine dared not dwell upon this problem. She only knew, as by a flash of sudden intuition, what was now troubling Wilfrid. In her

immediate interest in Sara she had forgotten the possibilities attendant upon her death.

The moment in which her brother had taken her in his arms and kissed her, had been very sweet, very bright. All things had then seemed easy, understandable, lucid ; but on her homeward way she was again assailed with doubts.

Wilfrid was reconciled with her — that thought made her heart leap for joy ; but *she* was not dying nor broken - hearted. What was she to say to Sara ? How meet the anxious, wistful eyes that would turn to her when she was with her sister again ?





CHAPTER VIII.

‘Death, with most grim and griesly visage seene,
Yet is he nought but parting of the breath ;
Ne ought to see, but like a shade to weene,
Unbodièd, unsoul’d, unheard, unseene.’—SPENSER.



ENTERING the kitchen, Katharine's eyes met an unexpected sight. In the centre of the room stood Crier, while Mrs. Holden hovered about timidly. He looked white and excited ; and as Katharine came in, both he and Mrs. Holden turned towards her.

‘Eh, I'm fain to see you, Miss,’ said Mrs. Holden, looking relieved.

Katharine demanded of Crier, in no very courteous tone, what he wanted.

‘I want to see Sara,’ he answered, but not

violently. He spoke quietly, but with a look of desperation.

Seeing that Katharine's lips were open to utter a curt refusal, he added, approaching her, and laying his hand upon her sleeve—

‘Oh, Miss Healey, I only ask for a right! Yon poor lass has been the light of my eyes ever since I knew her. Ten years ago, when I came here, she was a bonny little lass, that I loved as soon as I saw her. Since she was sixteen I've loved her, and hoped to make her my wife; and if I might have done——, oh, my God! she would not have been dying now.’

He paused, pressing his lips together and clasping his hands.

Katharine was moved. Again she recognised what a love this was; and was forced to own that, had it been a successful one, the fate of herself and of some others might have been much happier than it actually was.

'I am sorry for you,' she said, as gently as she could.

'I would only say farewell to her,' said he, eagerly. 'She's dying, they say——; you know—is she?'

'I fear so.'

'Then you cannot deny me one word with her. Oh!' and he struck his hands together as if smitten with sudden horror at some thought, 'Let me see her once—*once* before we part. It will be the last time to all eternity, for she will go to heaven, and I——' (with a low laugh, at which Katharine shuddered) 'I shall never be there to meet her—I shall never go there to seek her.'

He ended with a sigh only a trifle less ghastly than his laugh.

'No,' said Katharine, 'it will distress her too much. It will most likely hurry on the end. I cannot permit it. I dare not.'

'Let me only *see* her,' he implored. 'I will

not speak ; I will only look. I will not make a sound. Oh! you are not going to refuse? '

'Listen,' said Katharine, seeing there was no other way in which to end his ravings ; 'Sara is in my room. I left her lying on the couch ; she is probably asleep. If you will neither speak nor enter the room you shall see her.'

'Yes, yes!' said he eagerly, and followed her noiselessly.

Katharine opened the door softly, and looked in first, herself. Sara was lying still, and with closed eyes, upon the couch. She seemed asleep. Turning, Katharine beckoned to Crier, and he came to the door.

Katharine stood, tall, grave, silent, holding the handle of the door with one hand, while with the other she motioned back Crier from intruding too far within the precincts of that shrine ; for was it not a shrine — awaiting the descent of its possessor, Death?

He gazed with wide-open eyes and com-

pressed lips upon the face—the shadow of Sara's face—as if he were learning by heart each lineament, and waiting until all should be engraven upon his heart. At last, turning away with a sort of silent sob, he murmured, and Katharine heard him—

‘Ay! murdered! But you shall be avenged, Sara; you shall be avenged!’

Then he turned and went away, nor troubled them again any more about Sara.

When Crier had gone, and Katharine had taken off her bonnet and shawl, she returned to Sara, prepared to spend the evening with her. She found that her mother had taken her to bed, and she was now awake. Her eyes fixed themselves wistfully upon Katharine. The latter did not speak; what, indeed, had she to say? but she felt those silent, questioning eyes in every nerve. At last she took up a book, and tried to read; it was but a pretence—she was wishing

intensely that Wilfrid might repent, and come.

Presently Mrs. Holden came into the room, and, sitting down beside Sara, said—

‘Well, and how dost feel like, just i’ now, my love?’

Sara made no reply, but placed her hand upon that of her mother, which rested on the counterpane.

Katharine, looking hastily up, saw what she thought was a change in the white and weary face, and she approached the bed, and knelt down beside it.

‘What is it, dear?’ said she, tenderly. ‘Do you want anything?’

‘You’ve been to see——him, this afternoon?’ said Sara.

‘Yes.’

‘Did you see him?’

‘Yes, my dear, I saw him.’

‘He turned you out of doors for being kind to me,’ said Sara, loath to ask the

question that lay nearest her heart. 'Was he very angry with you for going?'

'No,' replied Katharine, faintly, for she saw whither all these questions tended.

'No? Did he——*what* did he do?'

'He was very sad. He is very much changed. He looks older, and troubled.'

'Ah, but what did he say to you? Did you make all up again?'

'Yes, we were reconciled, Sara; we are united again.'

She could not drown the ring of delight in her voice.

A long pause, Mrs. Holden was weeping softly and helplessly. She saw that the end was near, and at last said, tremblingly—

'Eh, my darlin', ne'er heed sichlike things, but think if thou'rt ready to——'

Katharine held up her hand to stop her.

'Didn't he say nowt about *me*? ' asked Sara, with a piteous persistency.

‘Yes ; I went on purpose to speak about you, Sara.’

‘Well ?’ said she, with some eagerness.

‘Oh, my child, how *am* I to tell you ?’ cried Katharine, in unspeakable anguish.

Sara raised herself, and her eyes grew excited. ‘Did he send no message ? Did he say *nothing* ?’

‘No, nothing,’ said Katharine, sobbing aloud as she clasped the wasted form in her arms.

‘Oh !’ cried the girl, in a wailing voice, ‘he might have sent a kind word !’

At that moment Katharine heard the door of the room below open, and steps on the stair ; but she scarcely heeded it, for she was supporting Sara, who was in a rapidly deepening stupor, and deaf to outward things. Katharine hardly looked up as some one came into the room ; but when she did, she uttered an exclamation, for it was Wilfrid who stood there. He looked awfully shocked

at the sight of Sara. Though he knew she was dying, he had never till that moment realised it.

‘Come and speak to her,’ said Katharine, looking up at him.

He went to her side, stooped down, and said brokenly—

‘Sara !’

At the sound of his deep voice Sara trembled, opened her eyes, and looked. Even in death she recognised and awoke to the face that had ruined her—she roused, and repulsed even the grey angel, when he spoke to her—the man whom she had loved ‘with that love that was her doom.’

Katharine moved aside, and Wilfrid, taking her place, folded the girl in his arms, and kissed her repeatedly. In his new-born anguish and remorse he would almost have bidden her live. For the moment he ‘repented him of his sins past.’

‘Oh !’ whispered Sara, ‘I didn’t think you would let me go all alone.’

She looked in his face, managed to put her arms round his neck, and said, almost inaudibly—

‘Good-bye. I wasn’t fit for your wife, but it was only want of time, and—and things wouldn’t come right—and it was what I cared to be—th’ only thing I cared to be.’

‘My wife,’ he whispered; ‘if I could, I would try to make some amends. But, Sara, I feel that I shall never have any other wife; never any but you, poor child.’

‘Ay,’ said Sara with difficulty; ‘there’s yon other, thou known, and——’

‘She will never be my wife,’ said he, in a tone of deep conviction.

‘Ay, well. I’d have done what I could, but——; it’s too late now. Good-bye! God bless——’

There was a long sigh, and then silence.

At last Wilfrid moved, and tried to lift the drooping head that leaned forward on

his breast. He gently laid the emaciated form down again : it lay there. The eyes were closed, the lips too, and over the face was spread a look of unutterable sadness. Sara had died, carrying her grief with her, uncured, to the grave ; and no sound was heard, save the low sobs of her mother, whom she had left alone.





CHAPTER IX.

'Swear me, Kate, like a lady, as thou art,
A good mouth-filling oath, and leave "in sooth,"
And such protest of pepper-gingerbread,
To velvet guards and Sunday citizens.'—*King Henry IV.*



WEEK after Sara's death, Hamerton was gaping and wondering over the fact that Miss Healey had returned to her brother, and might be seen any day, by those who were curious enough to look, riding to or from the factory or the colliery, giving her orders to Butterworth, consulting with Earnshaw, exactly as she had done two months before.

The comments upon her conduct were varied and stringent, but all partook of surprise,

and generally of censure. One lady, much esteemed in Hamerton as an excellent church-woman, and a person of weight and importance, explained Katharine's return on the principle 'that like seeks like,' and added that *she* would have left Wilfrid Healey to drink himself to death, or in any other way destroy himself; in which statement she was probably quite correct.

A general impression (and one founded on fact, in this case) was abroad that Wilfrid had lately made an immense sum by a successful speculation in coals, and that in the matter of cotton his business was almost daily increasing. This was somewhat exercising to the average Hamerton mind, which was acquainted with the adage, 'Godliness is great gain,' and felt itself bound to believe the words, but which would, nevertheless, have seen the fitness of things much more distinctly if Mr. Healey's enterprises had turned out failures.

Ughtred Earnshaw, too, had been raised to a much more responsible post. Still in name the overlooker, it was understood by all that Mr. Earnshaw was, in the Hamerton phraseology, 'th' head mon,' and that his word had weight in other matters than the mere supervision of workmen and payment of wages. He still lived at his old lodgings with Mrs. Holden, who, aged and enfeebled as if with many years by the death of her daughter, clung to him as if he were a son.

Such was the state of affairs outside when Katharine came in from Healey one afternoon, and, going to her sitting-room, rang for some tea.

Her reconciliation with Wilfrid was then complete? Yes, in so far that there was between them perfect peace, and more friendship and union than ever in the old days. She had taken up all her former duties again. All was as it used to be, but so much better. She told herself a hundred

times a-day how happy she ought to be. Was not the wish of her heart accomplished? Was not Wilfrid all, and more than all, that she had formerly longed for and dreamed of, hopeless of its ever coming to pass? She had never indulged in any very Utopian hopes or dreams. No ideas of vivid happiness, or anything like perfect content, had ever occupied her mind. Well, such dreams as she had allowed herself had come to pass. Her brother was her brother; he was kind and gentle to her; even deferential now and then, as if he reminded himself that he had wronged her very exceedingly, and repented him of it. Nearly all his evenings were passed with her. Katharine had indeed some exquisite moments now and then; moments in which all her pain seemed to her a cheap price to have paid for her present joy. How few must have been the joys of a woman who at three-and-twenty could brood with eyes swimming in happy

tears over such trifles as Katharine Healey brooded over—and think them precious—over the moments when he would come to her as she sat at the piano, playing her best for his benefit, and tell her not to make discord, but would smile at her, and kiss her as he said it; when he would turn back before setting off for Manchester, and ask her what he could do for her in town; when he would offer to take her to the theatre, or a concert, or, best of all, when one Saturday afternoon he took her for a long ride, and told her when they had got home again that he had never enjoyed one so much. These were indeed mere trifles, but they were the revelation of a purer, kinder, more unselfish nature—the nature in which Katharine had always tried to believe, though sometimes she had perforce failed to do so; and when he vouchsafed her these glimpses of it, she was indeed very happy.

He was rapidly growing into what she had always longed that he should be. She had no wish to see him turn into a professed 'good man,' in the orthodox sense of the word. For all the pain he had given her, she loved too well the free, unlimited liberty of thought, and the unconventional habits and life they had always led, to wish to see it changed into a dull, respectable level of orthodoxy and propriety. She had desired to see vice and bad habits cast aside, as one might throw off a coat that was cumbrous or worn out. Of scepticism, defiance of custom and hereditary opinions, she had no fear; indeed she could not now have changed her habit of thought or the attitude of her mind in respect to such things; and she liked them for their own sake, for the muscle and the flavour they gave to life. He was becoming all she wished; she ought to be perfectly happy, so she told herself fifty times a day, and fifty times a-day ended with a heart-sick sigh, and the certain

conviction that for all that there was something wanting, a terrible distance between her condition and a state of even ordinary, everyday happiness. As she sat alone that afternoon, thinking it all over, she decided that, to put it plainly, Wilfrid was, for some reason, melancholy, unhappy, and unsatisfied, *therefore* she was the same. Something troubled his mind, which, with all his new kindness, he had not yet told her. She wished he would do so ; if it were a grief, she was sure she could share it with him. She was, however, almost certain what it was ; she was, too, nearly sure that he would seek her advice in the matter. She was right, and the moment of explanation was nearer at hand than she thought. Wilfrid had not lost his old directness and impatience of delay. That very evening, as she sat alone after dinner, he decided to seek her counsel.

The firelight fell upon her, seeming in its rapid play more alive than she was : it danced upon the velvet of her robe, and shot a warm

light upon the slender arm, and the hand upon which rested her cheek. How slight a thing is a woman's hand! but what dare it not do, for or against a being whom she loves or hates? The light played, too, upon her face, always grave and sad, but graver and sadder now, even than of yore.

A few moments only had her reverie lasted when Wilfrid came in, saying—

‘All alone, Kate?’

‘Yes, Wilfrid,’ she answered, not moving, for she knew he disliked her to sit up and look attentive, as if she were going to entertain, or be entertained.

He threw himself down in an easy-chair at the opposite side of the fireplace, and leaning back passed his hand over his forehead, as if to smooth away some visible wrinkle or oppression.

‘Kate!’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you know I am going to ask your advice?’

‘My advice, Wilfrid—you? Oh, but you will not take it!’

‘Perhaps not. But I feel as if I could not manage this matter alone. And in the first place I want to know Thorgerd Meredith’s address.’

In spite of her expectation of hearing this very name, Katharine felt a sort of shock or thrill when it did come.

‘I can easily give it you. She is at home, but she will not be there long. Her father is dead, and she says she must seek some employment, for she cannot bear to live with her stepmother.’

‘Good heavens! You don’t mean that she thinks of turning governess, or anything like that?’

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Well, you know what I mean, Kate?’

‘I—suppose so. You will write to her, or go to her?’

Ah!’ he said, sighing uneasily; ‘and there’s

what I must talk to you about. Do you think our love was a true love, or was it something hollow and passing?’

‘No,’ she answered, her voice vibrating with the strength of her conviction; ‘it was true love. When you and Thorgerd are joined—if you were joined, I mean—it would be one of the few true and perfect marriages that are made, once in a hundred years or so, in this world. I will stake my life upon it.’

‘Such a marriage could hardly fail of being happy, could it?’

‘You would be happy. I am persuaded of it.’

‘Well, and another man would be justified in going straight away to the girl he loved, and marrying her. Do you think *I* should be justified in going to Thorgerd and asking her to marry me? You know what I mean—I’m not speaking of all past sins, but simply of that one thing—the last. Is it to

be a barrier to all time? Can it *never* be expiated?’

‘Oh, surely, Wilfrid. It cannot be for ever!’

Yet her voice had no accent of certainty. She spoke as if she were trying to quell some desperate, overmastering doubt that *would* assail her.

Wilfrid’s face fell. When he spoke he almost implored.

‘Can’t you speak more cheerfully than that, Kate? Have you no stronger assurance? You don’t speak—heartily.’

‘What more can I say?’ she replied evasively.

‘I would not ask her to marry me *now*,’ he went on. ‘That would be a sort of insult to her; but I cannot rest until I know whether she will give me any hope for time to come. I *must* know that. Till I do, I’m drifting about here and there without a thing to lay hold upon. Do you understand, Katharine?’

You are a brave woman — the only one, almost, I have known—and you won't shirk this for me. I'll tell you the whole truth. When Thorgerd answered that letter of mine, she implored me to keep at any rate where I was, not to go backwards. I swore to myself that, cost me what it might, I'd do as she asked, and I have done it. But now—do you think that after Sara——; I broke her heart, Kate, there's no denying that. What do you say? Ought I never to think of the tremendous happiness of having Thorgerd for my wife?'

Katharine was long silent. Upon most subjects she could judge as impartially as most men, more so than the generality of women. But it seemed as if, to make up for her strength and dispassionateness in most things, that in this one respect she was all woman, all unreason. For where Wilfrid came in reason went out. In most cases she would have urged him to do as he wished,

but now it was with a great effort that she said at last—

‘Wilfrid, go to her. Nothing shall persuade me that it is right for you to be wretched yourself, and to make *her* unhappy—for she loves you—for the sake of a quibble; your life passed with Thorgerd might be a noble one.’ (Here she went to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder—where it remained, light and steady.) ‘It makes me rejoice only to think of what you might do *with* her. But without her—all your life would be warped, imperfect, barren. And to say *that* could be right—no, that would be worthy only of some cloister-bred, morbid monk, who only sees life through the glass of his own unhealthy mysticism—not of a man, and a reasonable being.’

As she went on, her conviction, which had at first been but feeble, gathered strength.

She went on, ‘But put my opinion aside, Wilfrid, and go, ask *herself*. She will see

clearly and truly. If it is not right, she will not allow it to be done.'

'Ah!' said Wilfrid, 'that has the ring of reason in it, and I believe in reason above all things. Kate, there is no one but you in the world to whom I would have owned that I had a doubt upon this matter. And——do you think I don't see how quietly you have effaced yourself all through? My dear sister' (as he drew her closely to him, and kissed her), 'you have been very good to me, and I have been a horrid brute to you. Say you will some time try to forgive me *some* of my sins against you.'

Katharine's happiness was too complete for words. She nestled dumbly up to him, shedding some very sweet tears. He presently asked for Thorgerd's address; Katharine gave it to him, and he left her.



CHAPTER X.

‘And Michal sleeps among the roots and dews.’—*Paracelsus*.

FOR several weeks Wilfrid said nothing to Katharine about Thorgerd or about going away. Time went on so very much as it used to do a year ago, that she sometimes wondered whether what had passed were true. The only difference was, that she felt older, greyer, more staid than ever. She had never had much experience of ‘youth,’ and at four-and-twenty she seemed to have passed most of the incidents looked forward to by girls, and to have before her a somewhat blank expanse of future, which, if Wilfrid married, must be filled, as best it might, by one lonely woman.

At present she had, however, very little time for thinking of personal concerns. Business fully occupied her attention ; and it seemed as if she had resumed the reins of affairs at a troublous period.

Wilfrid had begun the use of a patent in his beaming place, which enabled him to dismiss several of his hands, thus throwing them temporarily out of work. He was immediately served with a notice, worded quite respectfully, representing that he was causing distress to many families by the use of the obnoxious machinery, and requesting him to have it removed, and to resume the old method. No notice was taken of the hint. Wilfrid laughed at the missive, flicked it aside with his finger, and said it would come to nothing, speaking with easy contempt, as men often do speak of unobtrusive opposition, when they are unused to being opposed at all.

Katharine feared it was but the beginning of annoyances. She appealed one day to

Earnshaw. What would he do, if he were in Wilfrid's place? He backed up his master's course, and said that if he were Mr. Healey, he should, now that he had seen how the patent worked in one instance, furnish the other rooms with the same. Katharine, to her own surprise, found herself riding home with a lighter heart.

After that there was a slight pause. No further advice was given to Mr. Healey upon the subject of patents, or anything else. Katharine took her daily rides, and did her daily work. In their domestic life the most notable thing was that Louis Kay was 'conspicuous by his absence.' Katharine never saw him, and was happy in the idea that she had really given him his dismissal, once for all, upon that miserable morning—the morrow of a night which she never remembered without trembling.

Sometimes, when she reminded herself that she was not going to be married to Louis Kay,

she felt as if heavy chains had dropped from her. And yet she tried to be sorry, and to think how kind he once was. But it was of no use—she was glad, delighted that she was free from him ; and she hoped she might never meet him, chiefly because she feared that she should smile into his face, and show him how much more light-hearted she was since she had fairly and openly quarrelled with him.

One afternoon she rode home from the colliery by Bentfoot village, a roundabout way, along a dreary lonely road, with a low stone wall at one side, in the interstices of which flourished tufts of moorland grass or bents, and long, feathery, serrated bunches of *Pollipodium vulgaris*—alias ‘pollypoddy.’

On the other side, for some distance, were high banks, cliffs, and rocks ; above them the moors rolled and swept away for dreary, lonely miles. Waterfalls came tumbling down their beds of black stone, with each its woody fringe of hardy stunted

oak and graceful mountain-ash — now, bare and skeleton-like, darkening the hillside. By degrees the cliffs became lower; almost from the road rose the moor, or rather its borders—rough-looking meadows of coarse grass, full of ‘brambles,’ briar-rose bushes, and rank, strong-growing weeds. It would have been a purely country road, only that here and there rose a thing like a squat stumpy-looking chimney; they were ‘ventilators’ for the long railway tunnel, which ran for a mile and a-half beneath road and moor.

On the left hand was what Katharine considered rather a goodly prospect. There was a lower road, with meadows sloping up to the one on which she rode; beyond that was the canal, and from the canal swept ridge after ridge of heath-clad moor, dark, gloomy, iron-grey in the February afternoon; each ridge growing higher, and culminating in the solid wall of Blackrigg in the distance. Down in the valley were mills, farms, cot-

tages, reservoirs, smoke, and the long chimneys which gave it forth; on a distant hill was a tenter-field, with long lines of white flannel stretched to dry.

Presently she arrived at the place she sought, Bentfoot Church. It stood desolately upon the moor-side. Moors were around and behind, and a dark fir-wood above; moors alone stretched themselves vast and silent before it.

When it was new it had been of clean, yellow stone; now it was greenish, greyish, smoky-looking, yet it was more in accordance with its surroundings than when it had been spick-and-span new.

Finding a side-gate open, Katharine dismounted and went in, and looked about among the few graves which here and there dotted the lonely sloping grave-yard, till she found that she wanted—Sara's. The mould that was piled around it was sodden and brown, though some sods of turf had been

placed upon it, making a mound, which in spring would be verdant. Katharine had never seen the grave; she looked at it now with mingled feelings.

‘SARA HEALEY,
DIED JANUARY 14TH 18—,
AGED 20.
INFELIX.’

That was all. To most people it meant nothing, but to Katharine what a history lay there buried, yet recorded! Her eye fell from the cross to the turf; upon it lay some flowers and leaves, pale-looking snowdrops and Christmas roses—things with all colour and life washed out of them—and a few of last year’s fern leaves, half green, half red, such as she had seen drooping from the chinks of the wall as she rode by. Her intuition told her it was Crier who had placed those offerings there.

‘The man did love her,’ she muttered to herself, and then raising her eyes she looked around.

‘A fit place for her to rest in,’ she thought. ‘As desolate and storm-beaten as the close of her own short life. Those skies look as if they never did anything but weep from morning till night, and that pine-wood behind the church—is dreary! Poor Sara! Poor child! I believe I love your memory better than I did yourself——. Here, child!’ she called to a boy who had crept into the churchyard, and now stood gaping at this astonishing apparition of a lady in a riding-habit. ‘Can you go and gather me a few ferns like those from the wall?’

‘We’n gotten’ some polyants at whoam,’ suggested the urchin; ‘our Tom grows ’em—gradely uns they are too; ’appen you’d like a tuthri on ’em?’

‘Yes,’ said Katharine; ‘if you will get me some, I will pay you for them.’

He disappeared within one of a row of cottages on the other side of the road, and presently returned with a bunch of fine poly-

anthi. Katharine again despatched him for a few ferns, and then told him to place the flowers upon the grave, mingling them with those already there.

‘Who puts those flowers there?’ she asked.

‘Why, a chap as cooms a tuthri times in t’ week. He olez brings some flowers wi’ ’m, and trims oop o’ round t’ stone, and lays t’ flowers down, and moves ’em back’ards and forruds, fair like as if he couldna get ’em to his mind ; and he lingers about, like, and looks around him, and frimble at th’ yate* afore he can mak’ oop’s mind to go off. My mother sayn as he’s a praycher down i’ Hamerton ; and they co’n him Crier ; my name’s Crier too—it is.’

‘A common name, child : thank you,’ said Katharine, putting into his hand the coin which he had been eyeing for some time with eyes in which delight and incredulity struggled so violently that the two expres-

* *Frimbles*—fingers ; *yate*—gate.

sions neutralised each other, and gave a somewhat blank look to his otherwise engaging visage.

Then she rode away from the desolate place, and went home.

‘Eh, mother!’ gasped the boy who had got Katharine the ‘polyants.’ ‘What dost think? Yon woman’s gi’en me a *shillin’*! Mun I gi’ th’ half on’t to Tom? Polyants was hisn, thou known.’

‘Ay,’ assented the impartial parent — ‘ay; thou mun gi’ sixpence to Tom, and t’other thou may keep for thisel’.

‘Dost know who yon woman is, mother?’ going to the door and looking after the distant rider.

‘Ay; it’s Kate Healey.’

‘What!—sister o’ yon chap as lives i’ th’ big house down i’ Hamerton?’

‘Ay; yon’s hoo.’

‘Bi’ th’ mass!’ continued young hopeful,

regarding the shilling with ever-increasing fondness. 'Our Tom *will* swear when I gi' him this 'ere sixpence; he'll welly jump out o' his skin wi' glee.'

At dinner Wilfrid said—

'I am going to Penfynlas; I shall set out to-morrow, Kate.'

She looked up and nodded, glad that he did not say, 'What do you think about my intention?'

'I've seen Earnshaw this afternoon,' he went on. 'I told him to telegraph for me, if there were any necessity; I can't trust you. The more need there was for me to be there, the more determined you would be not to send for me.'

'I suppose you did not tell Mr. Earnshaw that?'

'Something like it; and he quite agreed with me. I suppose you don't mind being left?'

‘Oh, not in the least! And how long will you stay at Penfynlas, Wilfrid?’

‘That I can’t say; but I will write to you.’

Wilfrid left the following morning; and Katharine was again alone in the big house, with only herself, her daily rides, and her daily business to occupy her time and thoughts.





CHAPTER XI.

‘Oh, Kate, nice customs curt’sey to great kings.’—*King Henry V.*

WILFRID had been gone some ten days or a fortnight, and Katharine had heard from him once. In his letter he merely mentioned having seen Thorgerd, but said nothing as to what had passed between them. Still Katharine was satisfied, and was, just then, well content that Wilfrid should be away. Since he left, two more communications had been sent to him, each couched in less courteous terms than the last. The latest had ended with a vague threat that if he did not do away with the

obnoxious machinery, 'there was them as could make' him. The epistle was vilely written, on smeared and extremely common paper, and was signed with a spirited little etching of a raw head and bloody bones in red and black ink.

Katharine received this one morning among the ordinary business letters.

Her first visit that morning was to the mill. Butterworth was in a state of fright and agitation. All the hands who worked in the beaming-room (beamers and twisters) were unionists, and had struck. Butterworth was evidently afraid of them.

Katharine heard his account, said 'Humph !' and rode away, thoughtfully. She went to Healey, feeling that she was not without an adviser. She told Earnshaw what had happened, and said—

'They have been encroaching gradually for some time—I mean the union men—but I shall make a stand now. Luckily we have

more non-unionists than unionists—I shall lock out the rest of the unionists. What do you say?’

‘It will be a long business, I’m afraid, if you do; and there will be no end of rows with the other hands. I should think twice about it. The people here have *not* a nice temper, and as for sticking at violence—you are aware they don’t know what self-restraint means.’

‘They don’t, indeed,’ said Katharine, her thoughts glancing aside for an instant to the tremendous power possessed by those ignorant, beer-drinking, wife-beating, impulse-governed men.

‘But I am determined,’ she added, in a few moments. ‘That is what I shall do. Good morning.’

Without giving him time to answer, she rode back to the mill, told Butterworth to give two days’ notice to the union men; if at the end of that time those who had struck

returned to their work, nothing more should be said ; if they still persisted, the rest of the unionists would be locked out. The men refused to return, and the lock-out took place. Katharine telegraphed to Wilfrid what she had done, and received for answer.—‘ Right. Shall be home soon. If needful, wire again.’ It might be right, but it soon began to be unpleasant. The locked-out hands hit upon the plan of ‘ picketing ’ those who were yet working—that is, they hung in groups and knots around the mill-gates, put themselves in the way, muttered personal remarks, generally of an offensive kind, gave a sly nudge or trip-up to the unwary—did everything, in a word, short of openly preventing them from going to their work. Katharine persevered, and one day came in for a playful hint that her conduct was not exactly pleasing to the hidden powers. Riding up to Healey, she was one morning attended by a kind of picket herself ; not an obtrusive one, by any means.

She was simply followed by a number of men and boys, most of whom were smoking, and who addressed no remark to her, but presently turned off in a body down a lane. The way in which their disapproval was indicated was a silent one, and came a minute or two after their disappearance in the shape of a well-aimed sharp stone, which caught her horse's side and cut it, causing the animal to start and rear. With some difficulty Katharine quieted and reassured him, and rode into the yard, feeling very angry. She told Earnshaw what had happened, and said she was glad her brother was away.

'Glad, are you, Miss Healey?' he answered, biting his lips with anger at what she had told him. 'I cannot say that I am. I wish he were at home. I think there will be a stir before long.'

'A stir!—what do you mean?'

'Some one has been trying to force an entrance into the new mill.' He referred to

one Wilfrid had bought, and which at present stood empty. 'And two windows are smashed—not merely panes of glass, but windows.'

'Oh, that's nothing,' she answered, making light of it. 'Why, you once said yourself, Mr. Earnshaw, that a man might as well have the pleasure of breaking the panes of glass for himself, when he leaves a house, as leave it for the boys of the neighbourhood to do. They always do it. And I have no doubt they are angry that my brother should be using machinery that throws some of them out of work, and yet have a mill standing empty. But it will not be ruinous if they break every pane of glass in Grayclough mill.'

'Not ruinous — ominous,' he answered, gravely.

'I think you make too much of it,' she persisted, determined to have her own way, but more vexed than she would have confessed that he would not agree with her.

'After what has happened!' said he, raising

his eye-brows ; 'the next time, Miss Healey, a stone may rise higher than your horse's side.'

'I am not afraid.'

Ughtred was silent, looking anything but acquiescent. He was balancing a ruler in his hand. He knew the rough and unscrupulous temper of the people better even than Katharine. He knew that Wilfrid Healey was disliked, not so much by the lowest as by the more respectable of his work-people. He knew in how much worse odour Wilfrid had stood ever since his treatment of his wife had become known. Ughtred himself had more than once lately come in for rough words, and what the malcontents considered biting taunts and sneers. The day before, as he went home to dinner, he had passed a knot of the lock-outs lounging against a wall, and a ready hiss had run down the line, while some such epithet as 'Healey's jackal,' had reached his ears.

Katharine knew none of that. She had

received the first intimation of anything like peril that morning, and she was not a woman to yield her will for one or even two stones thrown at her. But she was impelled to persuade her sceptical friend further. She wished Wilfrid to stay away, but she was also very anxious that Earnshaw should agree with her in that wish.

‘If you used your own judgment, would you send for Mr. Healey?’ she asked.

‘I would telegraph to him to-day, to come home instantly.’

So strong an assertion took Katharine by surprise, but at the same time immensely strengthened her determination not to send for her brother. If there were really danger, so much the better that he should be out of it: he knew nothing of it, and there was no disgrace to him. But she would not go without a last effort—quite certain, however, that she would forbid Earnshaw to telegraph without her consent.

‘Cannot I persuade you otherwise?’

He shook his head most decidedly.

‘I never knew anyone so sceptical — so over-prudent,’ said Katherine, in despair.

‘I am sorry to oppose you. I should not do so without very strong reasons. Besides which, I do not know that I have the right to leave Mr. Healey in ignorance of all this.’

‘I shall wait awhile yet,’ said Katharine, abruptly and decisively. ‘I fear nothing. I shall go away now, so that you cannot urge any more objections.’ Pausing in the very act of going, she added, in what she strove to make an easy, matter-of-course tone, ‘You will not telegraph to Mr. Healey without first consulting me.’

He too paused before replying, but at last said, slowly, reluctantly, and looking earnestly at her—

‘Certainly not, if such is your *command*.’

Perhaps he could scarcely have chosen

a more certain way of gaining his end. Katharine suddenly flushed vividly as she answered, hastily,—

‘Oh, I am wronging you. I have cause to repose more trust in you than in any one I know, and yet I am driving bargains with you in this fashion. Do as you like, Mr. Earnshaw. I do trust you, *indeed*.’

She held out her hand, and added, with misty eyes, ‘I was thinking of him—you will excuse me—it is not that I distrust you.’

She rode away, leaving him elated enough, and not a little surprised to find the extent of his own influence over her.

‘I was afraid of my own assurance, even while I spoke; and yet I need not have been so. With all her pride and self-reliance, she has the most reasonable, docile temper I ever knew.’ (It is remarkable how docile we find the people who submit to our counsel or advice.)

“The reason calm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.”

Has she not all those, and something else as well, that puts her outside the pale of ordinary women? What *is* the charm about her? I've tried a hundred times to trace it, but I never could. I only know that there is something exquisitely attractive about her.'

The following day Katharine made a long-deferred expedition to Manchester, and did an amount of shopping which she hoped would last for some months to come. Then attracted by some pictures at Agnew's, she spent a long time looking at them, at one in particular—a picture she longed to have. It represented a bridge, and some dozen or so of people, who leaned over the balustrade looking up the river at something—*what*, not indicated. All gazed very intently, and not one full face of all the figures could

be seen, any more than the occurrence at which they looked. Katharine spent a long time before this picture, gazing very earnestly at it, and liking it, because to her it represented life—her conception of life; and she felt herself baffled before it. Thence she went to see some more pictures, but could not get that bridge out of her head. So she sat alone, late in the evening, and thought she would get Wilfrid to go and look at it, when a servant came in.

‘Mr. Earnshaw’s respects, Ma’am, and could he speak to you a few minutes? He says it is particular business.’

‘Show him in here,’ she replied, shutting up her book, and wondering what business could bring Ughtred Earnshaw to her at that time.

‘I am sorry to disturb you,’ said he, when he was with her. ‘Perhaps you know already? But——’

‘I know nothing—what is it?’

‘I told you there would be a stir soon. Two or three things have happened. In the first place, every pane of glass in Gray-clough mill is smashed. An entrance has been forced, to the engine-house, and a lot of damage done there, as well as a lot of bands and straps cut up in the weaving-shed. It is only the beginning, Miss Healey. I don’t like it at all.’

‘Why did not Butterworth send to me first thing this morning?’ she asked, angrily.

‘Because he is afraid,’ said Ughtred, impatiently. ‘He would give anything to be well out of this.’

‘Have you no idea who can have done this?’

‘None, except that it is an organized attempt, and looks serious. You are thinking of Crier, I see.’ (She assented.) ‘But Crier, though I have no doubt he has had a hand in it, could no more have done such a thing without *powerful* assistance than move

Blackrigg by faith. Of course, all the village knows that my master is away——’

He paused, considering how much more of what he knew he should tell her, and then went on—

‘They will not stop. You are a woman, and alone; that is enough for them. The next thing they attempt will probably be the house.’

A pause. She sat still for a few moments, considering the suggestion, while Ughtred waited a little anxiously for her answer.

‘Well, what if they do? Let them! I shall know how to receive them.’

Katharine spoke without the slightest bravado or emotion. She might have been discussing the guests of a prospective dinner-party.

Ughtred started up, and took one or two hasty steps to and fro. He was terribly disturbed; yet how was he to oppose her? This was one of the occasions on which he

bitterly felt himself to be beneath her in name, if not in fact. Had he but been her social equal, she should not have escaped without a very strong remonstrance; but he was not her equal—he was her brother's servant. Perhaps, if he told her all he knew, that last night a furtive attempt *had* been made upon the house, she might yield; but he wished to spare her that. Nothing remained but to reason with her. She would very likely be angry; would rebuke him, and bid him keep in his place; but—never mind.

‘You do not know what you are saying,’ he began, in quick curt tones, pausing before her. ‘You ought really to leave the house, and stay elsewhere until Mr. Healey can get back, or you should have some trustworthy person or persons to watch the house. If I were you, I should send for a couple of policemen. *Indeed*, Miss Healey, I am in earnest. I would give a good deal to get you to take my advice.’

She smiled rather derisively.

‘You are very good, Mr. Earnshaw ; but I did not think you were such a nervous person. I am not afraid of these possible burglars or incendiaries. I think they are quite a myth.’

He bit his lips. ‘No myth at all,’ said he, almost rudely ; ‘suppose they *did* come. What protection have you ? A half-dozen or so of maids, who would make haste to lock themselves into their own quarters at the first alarm, and leave you to fare as best you might.’

‘What you say is very true, and I am sure I should fare much better without than with them,’ said she, coolly. ‘Nothing is so confusing as having to think for a lot of other people as well as yourself. Now listen, Mr. Earnshaw ; since you seem so possessed with this idea of danger, I will to-night, when the maids have gone to bed, lock the door separating their rooms from the rest of the house, after which I’d defy them to go out, or burglars to get in, without my cognisance. For myself, I have means of defence too.’

She unlocked a drawer in her davenport, took out a small revolver, and looked at it.

‘I can use it, if necessary; and, to quiet you, will take it to my room; but I am sure such precautions are perfectly needless.’

Something in her tone stung him. ‘Pardon me,’ said he, looking, without any of the apology hinted at in his words, straight into her eyes, ‘you carry your courage to rashness. After what has happened, it is not bravery, but the merest foolhardiness not to be at any rate prepared and on your guard. I am taking upon myself to speak for Mr. Healey; I can only say, I wish I had his authority too, for the present—I am certain he would not allow such a needless, foolish tempting of danger.’

The smile with which she had spoken faded out of her eyes and face as she looked at him haughtily for a moment, too amazed and offended to speak. But her gaze could not abash him in the least. He had said his say, and did not appear at all inclined either to

apologise, or in any way soften down his remarks. 'Mere foolhardiness' seemed ringing in the air all round her. Respect stole over her unawares, and her indignant stare somewhat abased itself.

'I do think you exaggerate,' she said, laughing somewhat unsteadily.

'I do not think you are the best judge in the matter,' said he, speaking coolly, and following up his advantage. 'Perhaps the very worst. Your position——'

'Mr. Kay,' announced a servant, opening the door to admit that gentleman.

Katharine started, and stood up, looking rather excitedly towards the new arrival. He advanced eagerly towards her, apparently not seeing Ughtred, so earnest was he. His hands were held out towards her, but hers were lightly folded before her, and she made no sign of welcome.

'Katharine!' he exclaimed, 'you are in danger; you must not remain here. I have

brought the carriage. My mother *begs* that you will return with me, and stay at Stanlaw until Wilfrid comes home.'

'I know all about it,' was the cold reply. 'Mr. Earnshaw' (turning towards him) 'has come on purpose to tell me. But I shall not leave Healey. Give my—my love to Mrs. Kay, and thank her very much. I must decline her kindness, though.'

Louis bent his gaze upon Ughtred with anything but a conciliatory expression. The situation was, indeed, rather a disconcerting one for Mr. Kay. He had fully made up his mind that Katharine would be easily surprised into accompanying him to Stanlaw. Once let her be there——. He scarcely pictured distinctly what he would say or do to move her, but she should be moved.

'I don't think you *can* know all about it,' he said. 'All the windows in Grayclough mill have been smashed, and a lot of the machinery damaged, and some men seen

round the stables and outhouses here last night.'

'Did you know that?' asked Katharine, turning to Ughtred.

'Yes.'

'Miss Healey's safety will be attended to now, in every respect,' observed Louis, coldly and stiffly.

'I take my orders from Miss Healey when my master is not here to give them. She has not yet told me whether she requires any service from me,' retorted Ughtred, to the full as stiffly and more decisively than Louis.

Katharine was delighted to see how well her friend could defend himself. She said to Louis—

'I have given you my answer, and there remains no more to say. I shall *not* leave this house, and I can arrange everything else with Mr. Earnshaw. He is perfectly acquainted with all that is going on, and has offered to help me.'

‘You ought not to stay here, Katharine. Pray do not be so foolish.’ Then, almost in a whisper, and drawing nearer — ‘Only go to Stanlaw, and I will never enter the house while you are there. For God’s sake do this! For the sake of old days!’

A brief flash of emotion passed over her face. She could not hear Louis’ voice in those imploring accents without being deeply moved. Then she said—

‘You will not move my resolution if you talk for an hour. *I shall stay at Healey.* The rest is my own concern alone.’

Louis was divided between bitter disappointment at having failed of his object, and anger against the man who had forestalled him by a quarter of an hour. He could not, however, humble himself further, even to Katharine, before another person, but he said—

‘No words can tell how I am disappointed at your rashness and your ungenerosity, Katha-

rine. I hope that your adviser, or informant, or whatever he is, is able to protect you. I protest against your being guided by him; and if any harm comes of this mad freak, it shall be the worse for him.'

'My master's interests I consider mine,' flashed out the other, with quick yet cool defiance. 'If Miss Healey suffers from taking my advice, I shall consider myself disgraced for ever.'

'This had better be ended at once,' said Katharine, looking towards the door. 'I wish you good-night,' with a majestic bow.

'Oh, Katharine! How *can* you part thus?' he exclaimed, forgetting all for an instant. 'You may put on those looks now; but I will teach you that I am not to be disposed of with a sneer and a bow for *ever*.'

Having hurled which oracular remark at his former *fiancée*, he turned and left her with Earnshaw.

There was a silence of several minutes,

during which Ughtred looked observantly at Katharine. She was pale, as if with some deadly sorrow; her bosom rose and fell stormily, and some tears glittered upon her eyelashes.

‘Whatever the cause of their estrangement,’ thought Ughtred, giving way for a moment to a feeling of raging jealousy, ‘she cannot see him and speak to him without suffering acutely, which does not look as if her regard for him were yet cold in its grave.’

At last Katharine said, in a voice of much weariness—

‘Now, Mr. Earnshaw, there is nothing more to be done. I intend to remain where I am. I prophesy that your fears are groundless. I will have no one in the house; do you understand?’

‘If you will have no one in the house, you shall have some one out of it,’ he answered, calmly. ‘I shall most likely send

for one of the watchmen from the mill, and we will watch the house to-night. I have a reason for wishing to do so; I am almost certain there is need for it.'

He was more than *almost* certain, had he chosen to say so.

'You *will*—you *will*!' said Katharine, but not very boldly. 'You take a good deal upon yourself, Mr. Earnshaw.'

'When one person casts his burden down, another has to take it up: that truth is not considered nearly enough. You can't lay your duty down by the roadside and leave it there; what you leave undone another has to do,' said Ughtred, argumentatively. Then, after a pause, 'I don't even know that I need a fellow-watchman. Let me have Cæsar, your bloodhound—he knows me, and obeys me; and I'll undertake to scatter any midnight visitors who may come.'

For an instant expostulatory words came crowding to her lips. She opened her mouth

to utter them ; then, with a sudden change and a smile, for which he could not account, she said—

‘ Very well. Cæsar, the watchman, the coachman, the grooms, are all at your service. Do what you like ; only don’t alarm those silly girls in the kitchen. And now, as I am rather bewildered with so much ado about nothing, I will wish you good-night ; but I will not thank you until we see what fearful events happen.’

He smiled, took the hand she offered, and bowed over it in silence ; but presently said—

‘ I am quite content to abide by that.’





CHAPTER XII.

“Now, my dear friend, allow the young man to receive what praise I can give him. I have a great desire to pronounce his encomium.”

—SHELLEY'S *Banquet of Plato*.

AT breakfast Katharine asked if there had been any disturbance during the night.

‘Law, yes ’m!’ said the maid, opening her eyes to their extreme circumference. ‘Mr. Earnshaw came up again about half-past ten, and began to loose Cæsar, and John’ (one of the grooms) ‘asked him what he was doing. He said he was going to watch, for there was rough characters about, and that John might stay with him if he liked—he didn’t want nobody as was afraid. But

John's got a rare good spirit of his own, and he watched up with Mr. Earnshaw, and it was him as told me this morning, [for we knew nothing about it before. They sat in the harness-room a good while, and then——'

'Well?'

The maid dropped her voice, as suited the tale of dread she was relating—

'They chained Cæsar so as they could loose him in a minute, and about half-past one or two o'clock they heard footsteps, and they looks out, and makes out *three men, 'm'* (a really fine dramatic pause). 'Mr. Earnshaw thought they was trying to make out where the dog was, so he opens the door of the harness-room sudden, and says, "Now then, you fellers," he says, "I'd like to know your business." They was *dumb-founded*, John says; and Mr. Earnshaw strikes a light, and lights his lantern in a minute, and asks them again what they wants. They said they'd lost their way, and

was on the tramp for Todmorden. So he says, "Well, the Todmorden road's straight before you, and the sooner you get on to it again, and go on your way *to* Todmorden, the better for *you*," he says, warning, like. They saw the dog, and as he was looking very ugly at them, and they saw as John and Mr. Earnshaw had got a pistol apiece, they asks him to hold in the dog while they found their way to the road again. "Oh, with pleasure," says he; "but if I don't hear a whistle from the road in less than five minutes, I loose this dog upon you." In two minutes the villains was clear hoff, 'm. John says Mr. Earnshaw was *that* cool, he might have been talking to a friend in broad daylight the 'ole time.'

Katharine dismissed the girl, and sat reflecting upon what she had heard. She bit her lips, thinking, 'How delighted he must be with my gratitude and my manners!'

Katharine was detained long at the mill

that morning, and gave Butterworth a severe lecture for not having acquainted her instantly with what had happened. She ended by saying that she could decide nothing until the master came home, but that Butterworth must not be surprised to find him very angry.

It was afternoon when she rode up to the colliery. She greeted Earnshaw rather abruptly, and he thought he had never seen her look so perfectly hard, business-like, and unattractive. She gave him directions about various matters, gathered the reins in her hands, and he believed she was about to ride away without alluding at all to last night. In reality she was delaying her '*mea culpa*' as long as she could—she had no intention of shirking it.

'Did you know all about this attack last night?' she asked.

'I had been warned of it by some unknown friend. I received a note yesterday morning, broadly hinting at what was in preparation. It

was in a kind of slang, which you would not understand if I repeated it to you.'

'You did not act quite fairly to me,' said Katharine, almost reproachfully. 'No, no! it was not fair. I meant to apologize to you for my ungraciousness, but——; well, I'll be franker than you were. I beg your pardon.'

'I beg yours,' said he, smiling; but he did not look very apologetic. 'I acted, as I thought, for your good.'

'My good!' echoed Katharine, with actually a merry laugh, and feeling wondrously light of heart. 'Since when have I returned to infancy? But,' becoming serious again, 'you are the kindest friend I ever had. Heaven alone knows why. Will you not tell me why you do so much for me, who am both ungracious and disagreeable, for I cannot understand it?'

'As you say, heaven only knows. I say, heaven only knows what should make you construe my poor services into benefits. And,

so far as, I can see at present, Miss Healey, heaven alone ever *shall* know, unless—unless the most unheard-of alteration were to take place in the order of things.’

The last words he had spoken half to himself, and now looked up at her, as she stooped from her high seat towards him, with a puzzled, eager face. Their eyes met: her words had shaken his calm to its very centre; and as he thought, ‘If I spoke the three short words which answer the riddle, how you would scorn and spurn me,’ there was not the usual utter and impassive coolness in his eyes and on his lips. If he showed any emotion, it was the very smallest amount, but

‘Little sin by none at all is vast.’

Katharine suddenly remembered the scene of last night—Ughtred’s quiet independence towards herself, and cool indifference to Louis Kay, and she knew all in a moment that it was not her servant, but her equal,

perhaps more than her equal, whom she thus interrogated.

He served her and obeyed her, but she knew well, and it is only vulgar minds which never do know, that obedience and service may argue the very reverse of a servile mind. Is it not true—nay, a truism—that he who best obeys, best commands? Should it ever be Ughtred Earnshaw's lot to command, happy would be his dependants; he could no more tyrannise than he could tolerate rebellion. The one and the other would be alike odious to him.

Katharine realised not a little of this now, and felt not at all ashamed that he had put her in the wrong. Before leaving, she asked his opinion as to telegraphing.

'I should wait a day or two,' he answered.

He was standing beside her at the gate, when a coarsely-sneering voice said—

'Eh! who's yon two?'

'Why, that's chap as Healey gets to do all his dirty work,' retorted another, as a group

of men and boys passed. 'He knows as how t'shop 'ud be to' warm for t'howd him, so he sneaks off a coortin', and leaves a lass and a understrapper to tell t'lies as he dursn't tell hissel.'

'Nay, for why? There's them as would choke 'em down his —— throat if he gave 'em th' chance,' said a third.

They passed on, and the sound of a loud coarse laugh from the rest greeted a yet coarser witticism from the wag of the party, each remark being plentifully embellished with specimens of the 'dash dialect.'

'*What* is that they say?' gasped Katharine, turning wide open eyes upon Ughtred. 'What is that about my brother, Mr. Earnshaw?'

'Nothing worth attending to. It is merely bravado. They only said that because they saw you here, and wished to annoy you.'

Her own judgment confirmed his words; but she rode home bitterly mortified.



CHAPTER XIII.

‘And I heard the kirk-bells ringing very slowly.’

—*Book of Orm the Celt.*

THE next evening Wilfrid came home, even while Katharine was sighing over the fact that another day had passed without news of him.

She hung about him, not venturing to ask a question, but gladdened beyond measure to have him home again. He kissed her, smiled, and asked if she were glad to see him.

‘Yes, yes, so glad! But, Wilfrid, you look ill, you look sad! I must say it, for it is true!’

It was perfectly true. The shadow which, since Sara's death, she had seen on his face, was deeper, more marked. His would always be a beautiful face. To his last day, if he lived to be a hundred, people would turn to look after him—men with perhaps a little envy, women with hearty, involuntary admiration of the stately pride of his figure, and the clear-cut, disdainful outline of his face. Beautiful, but, to Katharine's eager, thirsty eyes, most sad, most saddening.

To her unspeakable uneasiness, the weary listlessness she had marked of late, the distant, seeking look that puzzled her, had deepened and increased with his absence. She wished to ask about Thorgerd, but she could not summon courage. She dreaded to hear some ill news.

He chose, however, to break the ice himself.

'Kate, you look at me so wistfully, it is irresistible. I have good news for you. You may congratulate me.'

‘May I?’ she said, eagerly but timidly.
‘Then has Thorgerd——’

‘She has consented to crown even *my* unworthy life with her love and fellowship. I ought to be happy, ought I not?’

‘And you are, dear Wilfrid, are not you? Surely you are happy: this is all you aimed at.’

‘Yes,’ said he, dreamily; ‘all I aimed at, and more. Katharine, can a man——; no, I mean, when a man has acted as I have, has he the *right* to be happy? That’s what I can’t make out.’

‘No one is perfectly happy, Wilfrid; but you must not give way to these unreasoning fears and forebodings; they are not worthy of you. Come, Wilfrid, you have sinned, but you have repented; and how can you expiate your sin better than by making such a woman as Thorgerd happy, and leading a noble life with her?’

‘That would make *us* happy—— But there is “Sara Healey, Infelix”?’

Katharine was startled. She had no idea that he knew anything of Sara’s grave. His words touched the very well-spring of her own doubt and uncertainty, but she could not bear to see him unhappy. She started up, saying vehemently—

‘That is all sophism, Wilfrid; folly, and worse than folly. “Let the dead bury their dead.” What have you to do with that now? I tell you it is *wrong* to torment yourself thus. Did you mention it to Thorgerd?’

‘No. I asked her to take my life and do what she liked with it. I told her that her husband would never be a happy man, or a cheerful one: she said she loved me better than happiness. Yesterday morning, when I came away, she kissed me—the first time she ever did so——: when will she kiss me again?’ he concluded, slowly, and then added

abruptly, 'Bah! what imbecility! Tell me—how have things gone on—smoothly?'

Delighted to make him think of something else, Katharine told him all that had happened while he had been away, adding—

'Wilfrid, won't *you* thank Mr. Earnshaw too? What could I have done without him? I honour and trust him more than I could tell you.'

'Yes, I'll see him. I like him well myself.'

They conversed for a long time upon various topics, and then both retired.

Katharine in the dead of the night awoke, and started up, with a thick, nameless oppression at her heart, and what seemed like the sound of a deep, hollow church bell tolling, which reverberated like a memory through the chambers of her brain.

Soon it was no more a memory: it became a reality. A long, resonant note kept clamorously sounding, and in two seconds she

had mastered its meaning, and knew it for the fire-bell.

She started up, connecting the sound in some way with herself and hers ; then, springing out of bed, she ran to the window, lifted the blind, and looked out to the right, up the narrow, wedge-like valley, to where, at the smaller end, clustered the well-known half-dozen or so of big factories.

They were all large, but largest and most conspicuous of all was 'Healey's,' longer, wider, loftier, by many a foot, than any other ; and this it was which Katharine's experienced eye detected as the nucleus whence streamed the red illumination that was lighting up the village, the mills, the railway station, yea, even the moors in the distance.

At first she unreasonably tried to believe that the moors were on fire, as happened often enough in clear, frosty weather such as that ; but her heart beat time to the clanging of the fire-bell, with its importunate knell. She

heard a door bang and footsteps in the passage, and running to the door, threw it open. There was a light, and Wilfrid was there, with a pale, angry face. He was fully dressed, and was just coming out of his room.

‘Go in, Kate!’ he said quickly. ‘Go to bed again, and don’t stand shivering in your night-dress like that! I’m off!’

‘Oh, Wilfrid, take care, take care!’ she cried, arresting him.

‘It’s that blackguard Crier,’ he said, stopping a minute, and taking her face between his hands. ‘Only let me meet him, and I’ll be even with him.’

He kissed her, and spoke some soothing words, but in a voice of suppressed rage, and she shrank from the devil in his eyes, and shuddered.

‘Take care! take care!’ she breathed, as he went away. How he strode down the passage, the stateliest, strongest, richest, handsomest man she knew! Alas! she thought of his masterful step afterwards.

Then it seemed that she went into her room again, and dressed herself, or nearly so ; but when she tried to fasten up her long, thick hair, her cold and trembling fingers refused their office ; she let it fall, and sat down for a minute. Then, restlessly, she rose and went downstairs to the smoking-room. A cold blast saluted her, entering from the side-door, which Wilfrid had left open in his haste. She made a light in the room, and looked around. No one was near ; the men had all rushed off to be as near the excitement as they could, and the maids were huddled together in their own quarters, gaping and exclaiming as floor after floor of the doomed mill fell in, and the costly machinery, indistinctly seen in the distance, came smashing down to the room beneath. Katharine went to the door, and saw that palpitating fiery glow behind the trees. She heard the roar of the people, and the wind brought dully the heavy crash as a floor fell in, and the splitting of the slates from what

was left of the roof. She looked up. Above the glow was the black-blue sky and steadfast stars. Suddenly she trembled from head to foot. An awful feeling had possession of her : under its clutch she felt as powerless as a man whom death has overtaken. Where had she seen all this before ? What did it mean ? It was not new to her. That glow, those stars—she knew them both ; they were horribly familiar to her. Confused, fearful shadows flitted through her brain. Some scene, some deed long since past, seemed struggling to rise in her memory from under thick clouds, and a heavy weight that held it down. She passed her hand over her eyes and tried to remember—tried desperately, fearfully. Looking up, she saw the funereal pines and firs rising around. Ah, surely she had it now ! Some words of poetry—what were they ?—

‘The spirits trailed among the pines, low laughter like a breeze,
And high between their swinging tops the stars appeared to freeze.’

No, that was not the answer. A strain of music: Louis' voice as he sang 'Adeläida' to *her*, and Wilfrid was somewhere near, though not within sight. Wrong yet. That was not the keynote to this weird certainty, that stifled her with its dimness and mistiness. What then? A dark moorland road, in the grey of twilight, with a damp, soft south wind, tear-laden, blowing into her face, and Ughtred Earnshaw walking by her side, stepping in perfect unison with her pace? Or was it Bentfoot churchyard and a grave? She remembered Sara's grave, and how she had 'heard the kirk bells ringing very slowly;' and how, when they buried her, the earth must have 'dripped awful on the hard wood.'

She sought back and back through her memory in vain. Something slipped away every time she fancied she had it fast. Beyond all, and above all, came the dread certainty, 'This is familiar to me; I know it; I have felt it before; it has been coming

for long, and it ended—— Ah, how *did* it end?' Were these phantoms but 'memories of an ante-natal life,' or was she going out of her mind? No; she had stood at some such door before; had felt that keen north wind, like a sharp-bladed knife, and scented with smoke from a fire, blowing in her face; she had seen the blood-red glow—she had interrogated the pitiless stars.

Cold and faint with fear, she returned to the room, and never could remember how she had sat out a long two hours. She heard the fire-engines from Thanshope go past on their way to help. She looked out; the red glow had diminished somewhat, but her heart throbbed faster than ever. Oh! to see Wilfrid once more! To clasp him, warm and living, to her heart! Till then, time crawled.

Steps at last upon the gravel and men's voices smote her ear. She started forward; they passed the path leading to the side

door and went round towards the front. She did not quite understand that till afterwards, but supposed that Wilfrid was bringing back some of the men who had been helping at the mill ; Earnshaw, no doubt, and others. She opened the door as they rang. By lantern-light she saw, first Ughtred Earnshaw, then two or three other men ; but Wilfrid—where was he ? These men carried something ; she looked slowly at it—was it a bier ? Had she been right when she remembered a grave and tolling bells ? She saw now why they came to the front—they brought home the master of the house. Her eyes fastened upon the covered form that lay upon the shutter the men carried, but she *would* not believe anything wrong. She recognized the Hamerton doctor, and then, as no one else dared to speak to that poor, silent woman, Ughtred said—

‘ We hope Mr. Healey is only stunned. We will bring him in.’

She led the way to the smoking-room, and they brought him in, laid him upon the couch, and she knelt down beside him.

He looked dead, but the doctor said he yet lived, and would probably become sensible.

At last he opened his eyes, looking round, blankly at first, and then with intelligence. Katharine was kneeling beside him, with her arm under his head, and Earnshaw was standing just beside her ; her face was veiled from all by the long thick hair that fell over her shoulders and around her.

‘What — Kate!’ said Wilfrid, indistinctly, and then paused. ‘It was an ugly knock ; if it had not been for that scoundrel, and——’ (he whispered to her), ‘Sara’s face, you know. I should have managed it, but for that. I never thought *he* would be the death of me.’

‘He shall not, he shall not!’ she muttered between her teeth.

‘Earnshaw — I’ve always trusted you. Kate’ (he beckoned Ughtred nearer, as if including him in what he said to his sister), ‘you’ve quarrelled with Kay—there will be no end of rows when I am gone, and it’s too late to make all fair and straight—don’t hate me when you find out how things are.’

Then, after a pause, ‘What was I going to say? Oh, Earnshaw, will you stand Kate’s friend? She will be quite alone, and it’s hard for a woman, alone.’

He turned fast-glazing eyes to Ughtred as he spoke.

‘Yes, I will, sir, to my last breath,’ said Ughtred, clasping his master’s hand.

‘That’s very good—very kind. Now, Katy, dear, kiss me. Kiss me, my own dar——’

With a last effort he pulled her face down to his, and their lips met, clinging as if they would never part.

But at last his arms could no longer hold;

they fell—his lips parted—his head sank. Katharine, stupid with agony, and not comprehending—refusing to comprehend—still clasped, still kissed, but clasped and kissed Death.





CHAPTER XIV.

'But now hath all, . . . in a single day, vanished with thee . . .
yes, all hast thou with thee swept, and like a hurricane art passed
away.'—*Electra's Lament for Orestes.*

WILFRID had made haste to the mill as soon as he had left his own house, and had found going on the usual scene when there is a fire or other calamity.

A mob had collected round the mill, which was an immense building, standing, with a number of outlying sheds and workshops, in a kind of hollow, with the railway on one side and the canal on the other.

Ughtred Earnshaw was there directing the

men who were working the Healey fire-engine. They hoped to save the office, warehouse, and boiler-house, which were separated by a fire-proof wall from the remainder of the mill. As for the greater part of the building, that was hopeless; it was already gutted, and the molten mass within was fed with material inflammable enough, as floor after floor fell in, and calico, straps, beams, wood—all dry, and chiefly oily—came to add to the fuel.

‘I think we can save the card-room,’ said Ughtred; ‘but——’

Wilfrid looked up, and the furious flames came sweeping down, and lighted his pale, angry face for a moment; then he was gone, and Ughtred went on with his work.

It was not until, as a forlorn hope, he had gone to the office, to see if anything there could be saved, that he had found his master, struck, as he conjectured, by a falling beam, *and lying* upon the floor, stunned. He called

some men, and they bore the master out ; but Ughtred had seen a shadow flit past in the crowd a few moments before, which shadow he had identified as Crier.

The fact, which neither Ughtred nor Katharine ever knew, was, that Wilfrid had gone to seek his enemy, with an instinct that he was somewhere near. He had caught hold of him slipping by a side-door from the office, and had held him like a vice, with what intent who shall say ? when suddenly he had looked up. A veil of flame was blown hotly in at the window, lighting up the office and a loosened beam which was slowly swinging down from the roof.

Wilfrid, loosing his hold of his enemy, had covered his face, crying out, in a voice of fear and anguish terrible to hear—

‘Sara ! oh, Sara ! I cannot bear it !’

The beam had fallen—had struck him down ; and Crier, after kneeling down, and taking a long, long, insatiable look of hatred

at the proud, unconscious face, had, with a quiet sneering smile, effected his escape.

The Thanshope engines at last arrived, but were used in vain. The mill had been deliberately set on fire in more places than one by some person who knew its every corner—so said many men.

The red glare got duller; it faded and faded; and when morning came, the trains went spinning past a ruin—black, hideous, and smoking yet. Travellers put their heads out of the carriage windows to look. Men on their way to Manchester whistled to themselves, and decided in their own minds that ‘Healey would not be on ‘Change to-day.’

When they returned, most of them knew what had happened, and had with them the evening paper, with its sensational heading, ‘Dreadful Fire at Hamerton. Total Destruction of a Cotton Mill. Shocking Death of the Owner;’ and one or two of them looked at the big, black stone house, with its damp,

rain-sodden look, and its sad, surrounding fir-trees, and bethought themselves what a scapegrace he had been, and what a splendid property he must have left, in spite of his mill destroyed by fire!

A Methodist minister, travelling third class with a favourite pupil-teacher, improved the occasion with a slight one-sided sketch of Mr. Healey's career and end; and used his death with much effect ever after

'To point a moral, or adorn a tale.'

Somewhat later, when the funeral had taken place, Wilfrid's will was read. It was a matter of some surprise to many people that he should have made a will at all. Present at the reading were Katharine, Mr. Bryant the lawyer, Louis Kay and his mother.

Katharine sat apart. She just roused herself to listen when Mr. Bryant began to read. He told them that the will was dated June 15th of the last year.

‘Ah!’ thought Katharine, ‘before he knew Thorgerd—before he went to Haythorpe.’

It was a very short will. It devised all his property, of every kind, without fetter or restraint, to his sister Katharine, provided she married Louis Kay. If not, it was left in the same free and unconditioned manner to Louis Kay himself. Katharine’s own fortune, inherited by her father’s will, and which included also her mother’s property, was of course her own in any case.

When this was made known, there was a short silence, during which Mr. Bryant looked as innocent as he could, but was unable to resist giving inquiring glances at Miss Healey and Mr. Kay; Mrs. Kay startled, and rather alarmed; Louis, even, a little amazed; Katharine utterly indifferent.

‘I did not know this, Katharine,’ said Louis, at last.

‘Very likely not. I can hardly congratulate you upon coming into the property, for its owners have always been very miserable people.’

Obedying a sign from Louis, his mother and Mr. Bryant left the room.

‘Why do you talk about *my* property, Katharine? Don’t you see by Wilfrid’s will what he wished for you? You will surely not refuse this—his last desire——’

‘I am thankful to know that it was very far from being his last desire,’ said Katharine.

‘*My* property!’ went on Louis, with a short laugh. ‘What would it be to me, unless you will take it?’

‘Not I!’ said she, scornfully. ‘It is most beautifully arranged that it should be yours, Louis. It is your *revenge*, don’t you see? You have it now; is it not as sweet and as satisfying as your fondest hopes ever pictured it? My brother has openly slighted me; has made a condition to be fulfilled before I could inherit his property—a condition which virtually takes it out of my hands entirely. He has played into your hand in every way. You have triumphed; you are

the winner. But——' (her eyes grew bright, and she smiled a radiant quivering smile in the midst of her anguish), 'when he made that will he cared nothing for me; when he died he loved me—*he loved me* better than all. His last words were for me; his last thought and his last kiss. He called for no one else; he wanted no one else, and *I am happy*. Say no more to me. I want to hear no more. You are powerless to trouble me now, for you cannot harm him.'

She ceased, a sob catching her breath. Louis retorted in a trembling voice—

'I have not deserved *this*—that you should treat me as if I desired to injure you—*you*, when you know I would give all I possess, fifty times over, to—— Katharine, my *darling*' (seizing her hands quickly), 'you *shall* come to me—you *shall* be mine. I've a right to you before——'

She broke from him with a gesture of passionate repugnance.

‘At that folly *yet*!’ she exclaimed angrily. ‘I will not bear it. You degrade me every time you open your lips on the subject. Rave and protest as you will, I stand above all your efforts, and you know it. I’ll leave you. I wish you long life and health to enjoy the *revenge* you have secured at last.’

Before he could move she had disappeared, leaving behind her a ringing echo of her scornful, sneering words; leaving Louis to wish that his tongue had been cut out before he had spoken the word ‘revenge’ to her—the word that she never had forgiven, and would never forgive; the word which he had uttered in his haste and anger, and which she had brooded over in her pain and anguish till it had, in her mind, stamped him not only as traitor, but as coward.



CHAPTER XV.

'They die—the dead return not. Misery
Sits near an open grave, and calls them over,
A youth with hoary hair and haggard eye.
They are the names of kindred, friend, and lover
Which he so feebly calls—they all are gone—
Fond wretch !—all dead : these vacant names alone,
This most familiar scene, my pain,
These tombs, alone remain.' —SHELLEY.

THAT evening Katharine sent a message to Ughtred Earnshaw—she wished to speak to him, if it would not trouble him too much to come and see her. In a short time he was with her. He had not seen her, except for about two minutes, since Wilfrid's death, and he looked somewhat eagerly at her now. It seemed to him that she was worn to a shadow. Grief had bodily wasted her away. She had said exult-

antly to Louis, that since Wilfrid had died loving her, she was happy—so she might be, but it was that awful kind of happiness which consumes life even more rapidly than sorrow. As she advanced to Ughtred and held out her hand, his heart sank. It was not only that she was such a picture of suffering; she looked likewise so isolated, so alone. Her grief had wasted her, tortured her, mastered her, but had not taught her to descend from her alien peak of misery, and seek support or comfort from any of the other men and women who bore their griefs together, in companies or hand-in-hand. She stood alone, or if she had fallen under the pitiless storm, she had fallen alone; she lay prostrate alone—she had never stretched forth her hand to any fellow-being, and said, ‘Help me! Speak to me! Comfort me!’

This he guessed, correctly. There was pride and obstinacy in her grief—or rather in her way of meeting her grief. She said nothing, but she rebelled wildly within her-

self. Before Wilfrid was buried she had gone and looked at him, standing with lightly-folded hands, and thinking—

‘I am just four-and-twenty. I may live to be eighty—who knows? I am strong and sound and healthy. Fifty-six years, and what at the end? To meet you again? Oh, if I believed that, I would live a thousand and never murmur; but I do not know any such thing. I lie if I say I do——; well, and *is* this the end? Must I say good-bye now?’

She looked at the beautiful calm face before her; at the wide brow; the soft, silken brown hair that swept over it; the straight, stern eyebrows; the mouth closed so firmly that you saw it would never speak again. As she looked, a great and terrible fear came over her. What if she never *should* see him again? Her brain reeled for a moment! At last she turned away, feeling that she knew nothing, and believed nothing.

Her idol lay low ; she was learning that she must do without it ; her fear was, that she must do without it—not for time, but for eternity.

So she came away, uncomforted.

‘I have sent for you to-night partly on business, and partly for another reason,’ said she to Ughtred. ‘My brother’s will was read this morning, Mr. Earnshaw, and all that was his belongs to Mr. Kay now, not to me ; Healey is no longer my home. I have no home. I tell you because I did not wish you to learn from an indifferent person. My day is over here. I cannot come now to direct you, for I have no affairs to need looking after.’

Her voice wavered, but rather than let it break she stopped.

‘Nor shall I be here to be directed,’ replied he. ‘Mr. Kay gave me notice this afternoon.’

‘*What ?*’ said she, starting up. ‘Pray what reasons did he give ?’

‘He merely said he should require a different kind of manager.’

‘I daresay he will. I should say he could not do better than take on Crier again.’

‘About Crier?’ said Ughtred, quickly; ‘do you mean to remain perfectly quiet?’

‘Yes, that is my intention. Poor wretch! Let him get what satisfaction he can out of his revenge. It will be but a sorry pleasure if he happens to go to Bentfoot churchyard.’

Ughtred knew what she meant. Sara’s grave had received her husband’s remains, and so ‘in their death they were not divided.’

There was a long pause after the last words of Katharine, during which her mind and her companion’s went back and back over the bleak and bitter past, and they saw nothing but darkness.

For the present it was indeed drear; and when Katharine tremblingly essayed to lift a corner of the veil dividing present from *future*, she instantly let it fall again, for she

saw nothing but solitude and a blank. Anything—the hardest work, the most painful toil—would have been more tolerable than that frightful void.

She covered her face with her hands, and sighed heavily. Then, looking up, she said—

‘I am very weak ; it is as well, perhaps, that I have no affairs to look after. You remember what my brother said to you that night—what should you say he meant?’

‘Did you know of his having made a will?’

‘No.’

‘I think he meant that he had made an unjust will, which he was sorry to be unable to change—that now he trusted all to you. I am sure he meant that ; no one could doubt it. His last words and his last thoughts were all for you.’

‘You are sure ? You believe that he forgot even Thorgerd, and died thinking of *me* ?’ she exclaimed, forgetting everything save that

Ughtred's was a sympathetic nature—that he could read her heart, and speak words suited to its inmost need.

‘I do believe it from my very soul—as I believe I live and breathe. Forgive my touching upon such a subject. He had been unjust—he had been unkind, but your love conquered. How could it be otherwise? His heart turned to you. When people are dying, or in supreme peril, they always seem to have an instinct that points out who loves them best and most unselfishly, and to that one they turn—it was so with him.’

‘Yes, I believe it; I do believe it,’ said Katharine, her eyes lovely with happy tears. ‘It is true: in that last moment we were all in all to each other.’

Then, turning from that topic, she added, ‘And so, knowing what he really felt, I can afford to pass by that will as if it meant nothing. I shall not make a claim nor a protest. Let Louis Kay take everything.’

It will be what he deserves—dust and ashes. But—and this is why I sent for you, Mr. Earnshaw—I cannot stay here. The thought of remaining in this place, with everything different, is absolutely horrible to me. I could not bear it. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, perfectly; and I entirely agree with you.’

‘I am glad you do, for I want your advice. I have been thinking about where I should go. Do you know, there is not a place where I have a friend? I believe we have some connections somewhere in the south of England; but we do not know them, and they do not know us; besides which, I dislike the south; I am north in my very nature. So — I remembered the place where you said your only relations lived. What sort of place is it? Could I live there for a while?’

‘Miss Healey!’ exclaimed he, looking at the stately room in which they sat, with its perfect appointments and finished luxury, ‘your home——’

‘Put that out of your head. I am used to all these things, but they have no significance whatever for me. At Mrs. Holden’s I was never annoyed by my poor quarters. So speak independently of externals.’

‘Skernford is dull enough, but beautiful. And if you do not want to have any trouble in finding a place, my aunt will receive you if I ask her to do so. No’ (seeing she looked doubtful), ‘it will be no inconvenience. She has had people before; and though she is independent, she is not rich. They need never trouble you; you would have your own quarters.’

‘I should like it because it would have an association with home and you, for you have been very kind to me. If I could only think it would be no trouble to them—or to you.’

‘To satisfy you, I will write to them. They will say truly what they wish.’

‘That is kind. And now—what are you

going to do, Mr. Earnshaw? It is a great trouble to me that you should have been treated so unceremoniously.'

'I can find another situation, but I have thought nothing about my own plans yet. I shall never care for any place as I do for this.'

'Every one who has anything to do with me is sure to be unlucky,' said Katharine, sadly and bitterly. 'You are no exception, you see.'

'I don't know that,' he replied; and she thought he was going to add more, but he suddenly closed his lips and said nothing else.

Three days later, Ughtred saw Katharine off from the Hamerton railway station, as she began her northward journey to Skernford.

His aunt's answer to his application had been favourable. She and Susannah her daughter would be glad to receive the friend he wished them to accommodate.

'And you are sure you will come to Skern-

ford, Mr. Earnshaw, before you decide upon any further plans?’

‘Quite sure, if nothing should prevent me.’

‘I shall look forward to seeing you. And if anything of moment should occur here, you will write to me.’

‘I will. I promise it faithfully. I hope to carry out every wish of yours fully.’

‘I can never thank you as I ought,’ said Katharine, in a trembling voice, as she held out her hand. ‘But I am thankful that you are my friend; and I bless the day you came here. Good-bye!’

The dark, steady eyes met hers in a look of sad farewell. They were never prone to betray their master’s secrets, but Katharine felt that this (to her) inexplicable man was moved by some emotion which he would not allow himself to utter.

The train began to move: in a few moments it had left the station, and she was on her way to a strange place, to strange people. Her

eyes devoured the familiar landscape through which the train hurried—so fast it went, as if it grudged her the sight that caused such joy and pain. There was the shell of Healey Mill, with a mass of twisted machinery filling the whole centre. There were the sloping green fields ; the dark, sluggish canal ; the long, damp, straight ‘Todmorden Road ;’ the white house in a wood on the left, Stanlaw amid its trees on the right—the dark wall of Blackrigg shutting out all behind. So they flew on, past more mills, into a cutting, with the canal at the top on the right, and half-a-dozen careless children on the bank, looking down, shouting and waving their caps at the train. Then they plunged into the long tunnel, and all was darkness. Katharine crouched into a corner of the carriage ; she thought of her only friend who was now on his way to the office up at Healey ; she thought of the desolate, weather-beaten Bentfoot Church, and of the grave in the churchyard — which made all

earth a grave to her—of herself, with a long, lonely life before her, and she pressed her hands over her mouth to keep back the cry which almost forced itself from her lips.





CHAPTER XVI.

‘Say not thou, In what were the former days better than these? for thou dost not wisely inquire concerning this.’—*Ecclesiastes*.

‘Just then fled past a maniac maid,
And her name was Hope, she said.’—SHELLEY.



QUITE six months later, at the end of August, Katharine Healey was still at Skernford, in the county of Durham, under the roof of Eliza Earnshaw and Susannah her daughter, members of the Society of Friends.

No matter what has been her inner experience during that time—nor how sad, how lonely she has been. It is but a thankless pastime to trace the repinings of a loveless, joyless, plain, lonely woman.

Let me rather take up her story at the time

when the first glimpse of change appeared in the even, unvarying monotony of her life as it had been for the last six months.

On this particular evening Katharine had betaken herself to the company of Eliza and her daughter. Long ago she discovered that solitude would not do. She dared not trust herself, with the memories and the griefs that stored her mind, to be much alone. Mrs. Earnshaw and her daughter, if not very entertaining company, were at least something to be wondered at.

Katharine had sat for some time in silence, turning over the leaves of a corpulent black volume entitled *Letters and Memoirs of Sarah Grubb*, wherein were set forth the pious ramblings of a noted Friend; her excursions on missions to all parts of the country, and the different 'opportunities' she had enjoyed with more and less advanced brethren.

Katharine yawned drearily as her eyes fell upon the words, 'My dear J. G. had a precious

solemn time, beginning with the query, "Will ye go away also?" She wondered vaguely what it meant; then her mind reverted to what had occupied it all day. Turning to Eliza, she said—

'Mrs. Earnshaw, have you heard from your nephew lately?'

'I have several nephews, Katharine Healey.'

'But I only know one. I mean Ughtred Earnshaw.'

'Yes,' replied Eliza, 'I have had a letter from my nephew Ughtred (I could wish his name were less vain and unmeaning). Has thee any concern to hear of him?'

'I should like to know how he is, and whether he thinks of coming here soon,' said Katharine, steadily, and not avoiding the four inquiring eyes that were bent upon her.

'He speaks of coming, if the Lord will (at least *he* says nothing about if the Lord will—I wish he did), towards the end of next week.'

‘Does he? Does he really? Oh, how glad I am! Are not you?’

‘I shall be pleased to see him. But why thy exceeding joy in the prospect?’

‘He was good to me. He did me many kindnesses. He is the only friend I have, and I think a great deal of him; and——there are other reasons.’

Seeing a homily threatened in Mrs. Earnshaw’s countenance, Katharine rose, saying—

‘I will go and take a walk by the river. It is a lovely evening.’

‘It is late for thee to be walking alone,’ expostulated Susannah.

‘No; I will go and sit in the field where the trees are. I shall not be late.’

She went out, and walked up the road till she came to the village, which stretched out before her—the green in the middle, the cottages and smaller houses on the left, and on the right larger ones, while at the end

rose the church, with trees on one side, and below, the river—

‘ And between the river flowing,
And the fair green trees a-growing,
Do the dead lie at their rest.’

There were two old ponies and a donkey upon the green ; there were sun-dials on the houses facing east ; tall trees stood still and motionless in the breathless evening air. One or two figures moved slowly across the green : they looked sleepy, like the whole of the scene.

Katharine turned aside to a little path leading down a lane, with trees and a high wall on one side and a brook on the other, arched over with blackberry and dogrose bushes. Emerging from the lane, she was in a large sloping field, through which ran the lucid river. A group of trees crowned the hill, and all around lay pastures and corn-fields and ploughed lands. A long bank of woods, and then cliffs called the Rifted or Riven Scaur, shut out the

distance. Everything was in the grandest, fullest maturity of August.

‘All fresh the level pastures lay,’

and the short meadow grass under Katharine’s feet was soft and elastic.

She walked slowly on for a time, and then sat down upon the grass, having climbed the bank and placed herself under the shadow of the trees, so that the whole fair land lay spread before her. Village sounds, subdued by distance, came to her ear—the drowsy call of well-kept animals to one another—the clear, musical whistle of a labourer who worked late in a neighbouring but hidden field—and the melodious, gurgling murmur of the river amid his rushes. She did not see or hear anything of it, for she was thinking about what Mrs. Earnshaw had told her; and the news that Ughtred was coming had upset all her carefully-repressed memories, and left her eager, feverish, and excited.

He would be able to tell her about Hamerton—what was going on there—all the details that she craved to hear. The sight of him, she knew, would be almost overpowering at first: how he would remind her of past days—what a flavour of cloudy skies and moorland breezes would seem to hang around him! But, oh! she was glad, glad that he was coming.

She longed with an exceedingly deep longing to let her eyes rest upon his calm face and quiet eyes, and to touch once again his kind, strong hand. How long he was going to stay, what he was going to do, were questions she never asked herself. The thought that he might but be coming for a brief holiday, and might go away again soon, did not occur to her. He was coming—that was enough.

It was late, and the dark was creeping on, when she at last made up her mind to return to the house. Everything was indistinct as

she walked along the dusty white road ; and at last, putting her hand upon the latch of the heavy wooden gate, she pushed it open and entered the garden.





CHAPTER XVII.

How's this ?

I all at once am glad ; the clouds have split,
And a first genial beam of sun streams through
The rift, upon my answering face.

AS Katharine drew near to the door, her quick eyes discerned a pair of figures standing on the steps before it, and the deep tones of a man's voice broke off as she approached. There was a moment's pause, during which the female figure seemed to peer curiously into the dark, and Susannah's voice said—

‘Is it thou, Katharine Healey?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, not hastening her steps—why should she?—until at last she stood upon the flag, and the man who had been

talking moved aside, lifting his hat as he did so. But for that action she would not have noticed him. As it was, she looked curiously at him ; their eyes met ; she uttered an incoherent exclamation ; down fell her sunshade and the bunch of meadow flowers she had gathered into the dust : the gloomy, reserved Miss Healey held out both hands with the delight of an impulsive school-girl, and in an eager, glad voice said—

‘ Oh, have you come ? How *glad* I am !—how very glad !’

Ughtred could not retain an altogether calm expression ; he had fancied she would be, in her cool, undemonstrative way, pleased to see him, but such delight was more than he was prepared for ; his face flushed a little, and while Susannah picked up the ill-treated parasol, and carefully shook the dust from it, he answered Katharine’s impetuous, heartfelt words, with what to her sad eyes seemed *the most welcome, most delightful, and re-*

assuring smile she had ever seen. Yet that smile was somewhat forced, for he was both shocked and uneasy at seeing her so pale, so harassed, and so dejected-looking.

‘You have come while I was out,’ said she; ‘how is it? Mrs. Earnshaw said she did not expect you for more than a week.’

‘I found myself suddenly at liberty, and knowing there was always room for me here (is not there, Susan?) I came at once; and it is very pleasant after Manchester.’

‘You have been in Manchester? when did you leave Hamerton?’

‘More than a month ago. I have been in——’

‘Now, friends, will you come to supper?’ called the voice of Eliza Earnshaw from within.

Katharine, thinking she might be in the way, wished Mrs. Earnshaw to send her supper to her own room, but the proposal was resisted with such sincere heartiness that

she yielded, and went with the others, feeling so light of heart, and so disposed to see a bright side to affairs, that she was quite astonished at herself, and looked earnestly at Ughtred as he took the seat opposite to her, with a certain languor of movement, and a little, almost inaudible sigh that spoke volumes to Katharine, for had not she sighed and been heart-weary herself many a time?

A new, unthought-of phase in her friend's character was unfolded for her inspection, and she did not fail to study it. His aunt and cousin were evidently more attached to him than they cared to confess. Himself they loved, but, as he had said to Katharine, their creed would not allow them to be thoroughly cordial to him on account of his opinions. They were bound to appear sad and solicitous for him, and to try and convert him to their own beliefs. Katharine watched with both interest and amusement to see how he took it. To her the platitudes of the two women,

their small and narrow lives and notions, and their utter unconsciousness that there could be any other code of right and wrong than their own, had caused weariness and disgust—nay, had been sometimes almost intolerable to her; and she had once or twice betrayed those feelings. Surely Ughtred, too, would be both irritated and annoyed at his relatives' well-meaning but tedious remarks and doings. No. There was not a trace of impatience; he was as courteous and deferential to them as if they had been women of the highest fashion and the most advanced intellect. Their gossip did not seem to annoy him; he did not sneer at their enormous and ingenuous uncharitableness, and yet he laughed at them a good deal, in a good-natured, kindly way, making them laugh with him as often as not.

‘Thou comes from Manchester, nephew?’ said Eliza Earnshaw, during supper..

‘Yes, aunt, I have been there a month, as I told Miss Healey.’

‘Then thou has left Hamerton for good?’

‘I have—at least I hope I have not left it for evil.’

‘How did you go on?’ asked Katharine, eagerly. ‘What is Louis Kay doing, Mr. Earnshaw?’

‘He is—— upon my word, I don’t know. I seldom saw him. I received all his orders through his agent. The mill is yet a ruin. I don’t think he will rebuild it.’

Katharine’s lips were open to ask further questions, but, glancing at Ughtred, she saw that he looked grave and unresponsive, and she checked herself—she could ask him afterwards all she wanted to know.

‘Thou seems tired, Ughtred,’ observed Susannah, reflectively and originally.

‘I am, rather,’ said he, smiling.

‘He has some trouble or other,’ decided Katharine. ‘I’ll make him tell me what it is, and help him. Thank heaven! Perhaps I can be of use to some one again, at *last*!’

But then, after another look, came the wonder—‘Will he let me help him? He may be very proud about such things. He stood out very stiffly and humiliated me thoroughly before he would consent to act as my friend about Crier——; with all his kindness he contrived to wound me very cruelly.’

When supper was over, ‘the girl’ (a generic name for all female servants in that part of the world) was called, and Eliza Earnshaw read a long chapter, a long prayer, and a hymn, looking regretfully over her spectacles at the graceless being who would not perform the office himself, and who was secretly wondering and marvelling to find himself with Katharine Healey in his present position.

By-and-by Katharine said good-night, and retired to her own sitting-room; but the window was open and the front door, and she heard them talking, and even laughing. Then she heard that unusual sound—in that

house—a man's step in the hall; a short silence, which Ughtred's voice broke. He called from the garden—

‘Susan, come and look out. It is such a lovely night!’

Was it? Katharine looked up, and saw that the moon was shining into the room; and she had been so absorbed and so excited as never to notice that she had no candles. Well—all the better. She went to the window, feeling a new painful unrest at her heart, and looked out.

Ughtred and his cousin stood beside the sentinel sweet-brier bush, in the moonlight, looking eastward at the great lucent yellow orb, which had just risen above a cluster of farm-buildings and big prosperous-looking hayricks in the opposite field.

They could not see Katharine. She hoped it was not wrong of her to watch and listen to them, for she felt as if nothing but Ughtred's own voice could lull the ex-

quisitely painful feelings which it had itself wakened in her.

‘Well, Ughtred, thou seems glad to be here again?’

‘I am very glad.’

‘I’m afraid thou thinks little about us and thy home when thou’rt in that wicked town, money-making,’ said Susannah, dolefully.

‘Don’t I? You sceptic! Not a day passes but I think of this dear, respectable, humdrum old place. And I’ve thought of you too——; unless I have lost the thought,’ he added, as he searched his pockets. ‘Oh, here it is!’ he concluded, giving her a little white paper parcel.

Susannah undid the little parcel, and took out something which shone. Her voice, when she spoke, sounded very pleased.

‘Oh, Ughtred, thank thee! This was very kind of thee indeed—very kind.’

‘I hope you like it. I knew you were

such a proper little person that you would wear no ornaments but little bits of brooches such as I never see on any one else. And actually, Susan, Manchester is such a shocking place, that I had to have the brooch made on purpose. The good old Quaker pattern is extinct in that sinful town.'

'Thou art laughing,' said Susannah, reproachfully, pinning the brooch into the bosom of her dress, and looking from her moderate height up to her tall cousin. 'But it was kind of thee—it was indeed.'

('Oh,' thought the eager listener. 'How I have tried to speak in that grateful tone when *he* used to bring me home a ring or a bracelet that must have cost such a lot of money! And I never could—he did not care whether I was pleased or not.')

'It is kind of thee to say so,' said Ughtred laughing, and he stooped and kissed the pleased little Friend—'it is indeed.'

'It is late,' said Susannah, laughing too,

‘and I am going to show mother my brooch. Come, Ughtred, it is time to lock up the house.’

‘How desperately early you are here!’ said he, following her into the house.

Katharine Healey remained at the window gazing at the yellow moon, but with eyes so full of tears that she saw nothing distinctly. Those tears welled up faster and faster, and at last ran over.

She wiped them away, thinking, ‘He had begun to kiss me like that, and to do kind little things like that. Oh, why had he only such a short time to be good to me?’





CHAPTER XVIII.

‘And we will sit upon the rocks,
And watch the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.’

—CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.



THE next evening, Katharine, taking her way to the river, met Earnshaw coming from the post-office. She stopped.

‘When are you going to tell me all about Hamerton, Mr. Earnshaw?’

‘When you will—now, unless you prefer to be alone.’

‘Alone! Oh, no, indeed! I am going to my usual haunt. Will you come too?’

‘Gladly;’ and without another word they turned down the shady lane; and Katharine

at last had a companion by her side in the paths she had so often paced alone.

They scarcely spoke until they were seated under the trees where she had sat last night. This evening her eyes were open to the peace and beauty of the scene ; and she said—

‘ This is beautiful.’

‘ Yes ; I am very fond of this meadow ; it has been my favourite spot ever since——’

‘ Since when ?’ asked she, seeing that he paused, and looked rather wistfully across the river.

‘ One evening, years ago,’ said he — ‘ an August evening like this—I had walked here, and was trying to forget my sorrow (for I had a sorrow) in a volume of Shakespeare. It was the *Merry Wives of Windsor* that I had accidentally opened upon. Of course I had read it before : but I had somehow never noticed that bit as I ought to have done. It was where Sir Hugh sings snatches of Marlowe’s sonnet—

“And we will sit upon the rocks,
And watch the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals ;
And I will make thee beds of roses,
And of a thousand fragrant posies——”

and you know the rest ; but it was those two perfect lines——’

‘I know — “shallow rivers.” Yes ; when I read them, I first knew you may enjoy an exquisite melody in black and white, and without a sound.’

‘Somehow, then, they went right to my heart, or whatever it is that we feel with. It was evening, as it is now. I looked up, and lo——!’

He pointed to the prospect ; and Katharine, gazing around, saw that the words and the scene were exactly matched.

‘After that,’ added Ughtred, ‘this place was hallowed ground to me. I have loved it ever since.’

‘I am glad you have told me about it. I like it.’ Then, after a pause—‘Dare I ask

what the trouble was that had brought you here ?’

‘My mother had been dead a week. She and I had lived together, and for each other, for many years. We had been all in all to each other, and she was an angel—my mother. She surely must be an angel now. Her place, I thought, could never be filled.’

‘Oh, and has that idea been justified ?’

‘No, not exactly. First thoughts seldom are,’ he answered, decapitating a tuft of daisies, and laying the stalkless heads in a row before him.

‘And so this has become your favourite spot ?’

‘Yes. I think it ever will be.’

There was a pause, and then Katharine began an attempt to break the ice upon another subject—his own prospects. She had thought it would be very easy: what more simple than to ask him what his intentions were, and offer to help him in any and every

way, giving as a reason for her interest his services to Wilfrid and herself? Nothing, certainly, could be much more simple than that; but at that very moment, for *almost* the first time, there made itself conspicuous in her mind a question,—was he devoted to Wilfrid and herself? Or, if he had been devoted to Wilfrid, why? The best of men do not serve with utter self-abnegation an entire stranger, who bears a bad character, and is not given to treat his dependants in any particularly flattering manner; or if they do, their fellow-men, good and bad, call them fools.

Annoyed at the untimely doubt, she strove to thrust it away, but could not annihilate the fact that, whatever his worldly position, he was no longer *her* servant. He looked uncommonly like her equal, and she was far too proud a woman not to treat him entirely as such.

Finding that consideration only made her *task* embarrassing, she began abruptly, in a

tone so like the one in which she used to say, 'What business to-day?' that he looked quickly at her.

'You told me you had been in Manchester a month, I think?'

'Rather more than a month.'

'That was after you had left Hamerton entirely, I suppose?'

'Yes. I stayed there some little time after my term with Mr. Kay was up. I was sorry for Mrs. Holden, for one thing.'

'Yes,' said Katharine, unable to give her attention to Mrs. Holden at the moment; and she gave an impatient, indignant sigh, saying, 'I never felt so helpless and so furious as when you told me Louis Kay had given you notice.'

'That was very unbusiness-like. He had a perfect right to dismiss me; and if he had not done so, I should still have left him.'

'Would you? Why?'

'I could not serve a man who had spoken

to me as he once did. Of course it was his own concern, and I was indebted to him, for he brought me to Hamerton, but—— I would not have had him for my master, whatever had been the alternative.'

'No, I agree with you,' said she, with a hearty emphasis that both amused and pleased him. 'Now I am going to ask you something. I hope you won't be offended, because you know we agreed long ago to be friends, did not we?'

'We did: do not suppose I shall ever forget that.'

'I am glad to hear it, because you are the only friend I have. Well, as we are friends, of course I am interested in all that concerns you, and I wish you would tell me—if you don't mind—whether—what—I mean, Mr. Earnshaw, since you left Mr. Kay, have you been what the Hamertonians call "out of work?"'

She blundered on to the end of the question,

growing every moment more embarrassed and confused. It was a mystery to her how Ughtred Earnshaw had managed to become so formidable, but the mystery was yet a fact. Having concluded her remarks, she began to alter the position of the six daisy-heads which Ughtred had placed before him; and he observed the process with much apparent interest for a short time, and then said—

‘Not exactly. In Manchester I had plenty to do—of a kind. I could always find *some* employment there. But since you are good enough to ask me, I *am* just now “at a loose end,” to quote another Hamertonian idiom.’

‘I am sorry. But do you——; how am I to put it? Will not you tell me what your plans are? You must have some plans?’ Then, with a painful sense that he might think her intrusive and impertinent, ‘Or perhaps you do not wish to tell me anything. Still, I should be so glad if you would,’ finished poor Katharine, wistfully.

He felt within him a choking sensation that was both gladness and pain. She seemed so near, and yet so far. She was so kind and gracious, and yet her very kindness put him on his honour, roused all his sense of duty to answer her humbly and gratefully, when he would fain have been humble indeed, and grateful indeed, but not as a soldier in the ranks to a princess upon her palace-steps. He felt almost angry with her for treating him so; 'giving me glimpses of the heaven I can never enter,' as he bitterly and Byronically put it to himself.

'*If* I would tell you!' he exclaimed with some vehemence. 'You do do not know how precious to me is your——; well' (with a sudden change), 'you see I am like yourself—lonely; when I find a friend, I prize her, and wish to keep her.'

Unconsciously to himself, there was a good deal of pathos in his voice. Katharine was *touched*.

‘Then I am to hear your plans?’

‘I have a project on hand now. I may get an appointment for which I have been trying. In a few days I shall know my fate. Would you mind waiting until then, when I will tell you all about it?’

‘Yes, I will wait. And I shall hold you to your promise. But listen. Suppose you do not get this post for which you are trying——’

His face fell. She saw it.

‘Never mind if you don’t,’ said she, with her rare impetuosity, and her infrequent, attractive smile. ‘Never mind; I *will* say what I want to. You have been very good to me and mine, for no earthly reason that I can see; for I am aware what a disagreeable person I am: but though I may be unpleasant, I am not ungrateful, and——if all I possessed were required to do you a service, all I possessed should be laid down, not without a grudge, but with *delight*, for that purpose. You served——Wilfrid, and if I could serve

you, I should be a happier woman than I am now. Do you understand ?'

The speech was now fairly out, and as is generally the case with such speeches, Katharine had betrayed in it more than she had intended ; had shown that she wished to help him for the pleasure of helping him, as well as for the sake of his help to her. There was silence for a little time, and then Earnshaw turned towards her an eloquent face—too eloquent, for Katharine, with a strange, timid, startled feeling, read the reason of his homage and service. She did not fear ; she saw that her own words had startled that look into his eyes ; but the secret which he had said she should never know, was no secret to her now.

'I understand !' he replied, taking her hand, and kissing it, with a mixture of pride, humility, and simplicity. 'Will you think me a brute, a senseless clod, if I say that favours which I cannot repay would be so many dead weights *upon my life*, so many stops to my energies ?'

‘Favours! favours!’ she echoed scornfully; ‘if you call those favours, I say the more of them any one can have hanging about his neck the better. They ought to be wings to raise him, not weights to pull him down. I did not speak so when you made me accept favours from you. It is I who am paying, not you who are borrowing, if you *will* make it a debtor-and-creditor account. But I meant it to be the simple proof of regard from one friend to another.’

‘Miss Healey, the world——’ He was going to say, ‘The world will not indorse such proofs of such a friendship,’ but he reminded himself, with a feeling of exultation, that she had never allowed worldly considerations to influence her behaviour to him.

Katharine was seized with a sudden, perverse desire to lower that stiff-necked independence—for its own good, not for her satisfaction.

‘Then you will not give me even this, the first pleasure I shall have had for so long?’

she said, in so grieved, so plaintive a tone, that he turned quickly to her, with parted lips and a look which seemed to remonstrate with her for pushing him so far. But when he spoke, it was coldly, and almost sternly.

‘God knows how it hurts me to refuse what you ask, but if I let you put such pleasant fetters about my hands now, I should find in time that I was paralysed for hard work. Miss Healey, forgive me a vulgar abruptness of expression: I know my place, and so long as I am in my right mind I will remain in it.’

The words were rough, and the manner was none of the blindest. Katharine, who was not a timid woman, was silenced. While she bit her lips with disappointment and mortification, she felt all the time a glow of satisfaction, of admiration, thinking, ‘He is more than a gentleman—he is a *man*, and I cannot fool him. I was a fool myself ever to try.’

She sat with downcast eyes, feeling thoroughly snubbed, for some little time,

and then turning, with a kind of sigh, towards Ughtred, encountered his eyes fixed intently upon her face.

‘You said,’ he observed, ‘that you hoped I would not be offended with you. That was a strange idea, indeed. What could you take me for, to suppose that I could take offence at being offered such kindness? But if I have spoken rudely in answer to your goodness, I beg your pardon. Nothing could grieve me more—nothing so much, as to offend *you*.’

Katharine, finding herself blushing hotly and unaccountably, said—

‘No; I do not see the force of your arguments against my proposal, but I daresay that is my stupidity——; and women dislike so much not being able to get their own way. I think, too, that you are too proud—as proud as Aurora Leigh was——’

‘*How* proud was that? “Up to the sky,” as children say when they want to show how much they love you?’

‘She was “very vilely proud,” and so are you,’ said Katharine, tears springing to her eyes, greatly to her own amazement and disgust. Finding that he only smiled, and anxious that he should not see those unruly tears, she added, ‘And it is actually getting quite dark——; the dew is falling. Look at those white mists rising from the flat meadows beside the river. I am going ho——; I mean it is time to go in.’

‘Ah! I believe it is,’ he replied, rousing himself, and springing to his feet. Then they traversed the darkening meadows, the shadowy village, and the white dusty road; and when they at last landed at Eliza Earnshaw’s house it was dark.

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Katharine, as they went up the garden, ‘I asked you to tell me about Hamerton, and we have scarcely mentioned it!’



CHAPTER XIX.

‘He is ordained to call, and I to come.’—BROWNING.

SEPTEMBER had been ushered in. That year the harvest was not early, but full and plenteous. The rich land of Durham and Yorkshire lay level and fertile under the sunny sky. The trees had begun to show autumn’s first tinge of pale gold. The corn, in the latter end of August, had been a wonderful sight, waving and rustling in the fields from morning to night, ear whispering to ear the secret of the wonderful season, while poppies glowed and the deep-blue corn flowers gleamed in the

furrows ; and standing on a height, you saw miles of this glorious land, with its 'pleasant steads' scattered here and there, up to the 'lavender horizon warm,' where earth and heaven met.

For several days Katharine heard no more from Ughtred of his project or his hopes, but it seemed as if, by their conversation in the meadow that evening, the ice had been so thoroughly broken that it could never reunite and freeze between them again, cold and ungenial. From that time Katharine no more took her long wandering walks alone, aimless and solitary. Occasionally Susannah would accompany her and Ughtred, but not often : she had not the slightest sympathy with nature, but was one of those to whom

'The primrose on the river's brim
A yellow primrose is,'

and she was so miserable at their awful latitude of opinion upon matters religious, moral, and theological, and so urgent in her

efforts to convert them, that she derived nothing but pain from their society; therefore, oftener than not, they were alone. Katharine grew to recognize this period, with a deep sense of praise and thankfulness, as one of those rare 'seasons of calm weather,' in which,

' Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither—
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore ;'

that great sea of happiness and love which, with all the fever and passion of her life, she had never yet touched. She let the days go by, not wishing to disturb the deep, calm happiness upon which she had at last lighted, by any question as to its whence, wherefore, or for how long. Enough that the days no longer seemed weeks, nor the weeks months, but that they slipped by as quickly, and as filled with hope and peace, as the murmuring

river by which she had sat and talked with her friend. She felt rest, hope, and deep content in the mere fact that Ughtred Earnshaw was near to her—safety and shelter in the very sound of his footfall. But one morning she was roused from this pleasant dream by a letter from a Manchester firm. They wished to know Earnshaw's character, and his qualifications as manager and man of business. When she had answered the letter, she realized that if the report she gave decided the firm favourably, the result could only be one thing—Ughtred's departure; at the idea of which she felt very wretched. When he went; —again came the questions which for three blissful weeks had been silent—'Where am I to go? What am I to do? Who will care for me? Who will want me?' The answer to the two last was short and easy enough.

A day came at last, when the sun no longer shone—September went out with the

noise of gale and tempest. Rain fell, or rather was dashed hither and thither over the face of the earth by the wind, which blew in gusty spasms around. Katharine looked out of the window with a shudder. Such days had in them a horror for her—they reminded her so of her own life, and of the lives of those for whom she had cared. Sara, Wilfrid, Louis, had not they all been tossed and troubled? Had not two gone to their graves too soon?

‘ We burn out life in hot, impatient striving ;
We dash ourselves against the hostile spears ;
The bale-tree that our naked hands are riving
Unites to crush us ; ere our manhood’s years
We sow the rifled blossoms of our prime,
Then fruitlessly are gathered out of time.’

Was not that Wilfrid over and over? and she could not say of him that

‘ After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well.’

Ughtred was away all day at the neighbouring town, and did not return for tea. In the evening, Katharine, brooding over her

past, which confronted her like a ghost that she had fancied laid, was interrupted. Some one knocked, and in answer to her summons Ughtred came in.

‘May I speak to you for a few minutes?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes; come in!’

‘I asked you to wait until I knew my fate about this appointment. It was an ungracious thing to do after all your kindness, but I hate talking about things until I see the end of them. This evening I have a letter to say I have got it, so I come to tell you about it at once. Will you read this?’ And he handed her the letter.

‘What is it?’ asked she, smiling, well pleased that he had succeeded; and she walked to the window to read the note, for it was nearly dark.

‘It is to superintend an estate and some mines in Australia—Victoria——; the worst is, I shall have to go in a month.’

All hope faded, or rather flashed, out of her face; she forgot to congratulate him—she forgot everything.

‘*Victoria! Going!*’ was all she said. The letter fell upon the floor; her hands dropped hopelessly to her sides. It was so much worse than she had expected. She had never dreamed of his leaving England.

‘If you go to Victoria,’ she said, half to herself, ‘I shall never see you again.’

Self was still predominant. ‘The ruling passion strong in death’ is seen every day. But for once two selfishnesses coalesced.

Ughtred drew a step nearer. • His heart beat fast. For an instant he was silent, and then he asked, in a quick, low voice—

‘Do you care whether I go or not—Katharine?’

No answer, or rather no different answer. Merely that hopeless, grieved face.

Forgetting for an instant every created thing or feeling, except his unspeakable love

for her, he took her in his arms and kissed her—once, twice.

As soon as it was done, he returned, as he fancied, to his right mind, and, almost pushing her away from him, said brokenly—

‘I’m a fool—a villain ; but it is your own fault. You madden one with your kindness, as if one were a block of stone that you might—— ; now you will scorn me for my baseness. *Why did you look as if you cared ?* I’ll go : perhaps you will forgive me—in a hundred years or so.’

He turned away, but a kind of sob from Katharine made him look back. She was leaning on the back of a tall chair, and was weeping bitterly. He could not leave her so, and something within him said that weeping did not always mean anger. Those were not storm-tears.

He strove to make his voice gentle as he bent over her, and said—

‘What do you mean ? You must not play with my love, Katharine, though I have been weak enough to let you see it.’

‘Weak !’ said she, piteously ; ‘it is I who am weak. If you do love me——’

‘What ?—what ?’ he asked, breathlessly.

‘You will not leave me here alone,’ said Katharine, raising her beseeching face.

His heart gave a great bound ; but she had not satisfied his man’s love. Taking both her hands, and holding them fast, he managed somehow to compel her eyes to meet his, and said, in a low voice—

‘My love for *you* has been part of myself for long enough, but I must have your love too. Can you give it me ?’

‘It is yours. I put myself into your hands,’ said Katharine, in vain trying to release a hand, or hide the blush that now covered her pale face.

‘My darling, you shall *never* be alone again,’ he muttered, under his breath.

It was long before Katharine's tears ceased to flow. There are, however, tears and tears ; and some tears are much sweeter than many species of smiles.





CHAPTER XX.

Q. Mar. 'Why, now is Henry king and Margaret queen,
And Humphrey Duke of Gloster scarce himself,
That bears so shrewd a maim.'—*King Henry VI.*

KATHARINE HEALEY had been Katharine Earnshaw for a fortnight, and was on the eve of leaving Skernford with her husband for Liverpool. They walked for the last time in the field beside the river. A gusty October evening; the sky was stormy, and the wind battled fretfully with the trees.

On the following morning they would begin the journey that was to take them from England—probably for ever. They were quite silent. Ughtred was not unhappy. The future

for him was fair. Katharine was feeling as only women can feel at such moments. The strife between grief and joy was very strong. At that moment her heart was beating and yearning towards what she had lost ; her mind was full of echoes—and mental echoes, like actual ones, are softer, sweeter, more musical than the original sound. Who shall analyze such sensations, or who shall say why we love the places where we have known little else than suffering ?

They were stopped in their silent walk by a stile dividing that meadow from the next, and this obstacle broke the smooth current of reverie. Each turned to the other, and their eyes met.

‘ Katharine, do you repent ? ’

‘ Not for a second,’ answered she, placing her hand in his.

He retained it ; and they turned their backs upon the setting sun, and walked homewards, speaking as they went of things that had

happened since Wilfrid's death. They spoke even of Crier, who had disappeared no one knew where ; and Katharine found that she could own to Ughtred her conviction that the man had been wronged, and that Wilfrid had sinned very dreadfully.

As they spoke of Louis Kay their voices sank ; they knew he seemed to outsiders so little changed by the death of his friend and the loss of his promised wife, that the world said he had not cared a straw for the one, and had valued only the money of the other. But these two, who were not outsiders, knew how different it was ; and Katharine, whose whole nature seemed to have softened under her new happiness, could not help weeping as she spoke of him.

Then they talked of Thorgerd, and how they should see her soon, for she was to join them in their emigration. It had touched Katharine inexpressibly when Ughtred, finding her uneasy and troubled on account of a letter

from Thorgerd, had himself proposed the scheme.

‘Do I repent?’ repeated Katharine, as they drew close to the house. ‘How can you ask? Do people repent being happy when they have once known what sadness is?’

It may be that Katharine and Ughtred did feel glad as they saw the murky little Isle where they had loved and suffered growing smaller; and when night finally covered it altogether, they may have been pleased to know that to-morrow it would have vanished altogether from their ken. But though Katharine is surrounded by her husband’s protecting arms, encircled by his love, one with him in nearly all feelings and wishes, yet she casts back long, lingering, heart-aching memories to that bleak Lancashire village—to that lonely grave on the moorland slope, where lie buried her worst grief, her keenest sorrow, and with them her strongest

love and her deepest joy. She will never repent her marriage. As years go on, and her husband prospers in outward things, and becomes important and noted, she will never regret the moment in which she asked him not to leave her alone. But whether her nature will attain its full stature; whether she will become the grand thing whose possibilities were latent in her;—in two words, whether, as she grows older, she grows continually happier, who shall say? She herself would probably answer, ‘I am as happy as it is possible for a woman to be; and I have what every one is agreed in saying a woman ought to have—some one to live for.’

THE END.

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